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The Metaphysics of Causation in the Creation Accounts of Avicenna and Aquinas

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Is approved by the final examining committee:

Jeffrey Brower

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Date

THE METAPHYSICS OF CAUSATION IN THE
CREATION ACCOUNTS OF AVICENNA AND AQUINAS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Julie A. Swanstrom

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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of

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For my family, with gratitude to their support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

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The medieval conception of monotheistic creation is this: God voluntarily creates the universe from nothing. Endorsed by medieval philosophers, this conception of creation is in tension with their understanding of causation more generally. Each theory of causation available—Aristotelian efficient causation in which an agent acts upon a patient, and Neoplatonic emanation in which beings are produced through a series of emanations—have attractive explanatory features, but neither theory aligns perfectly with divine creation. Since God acts to create, efficient causation seems to include creating; yet, efficient causation is not causation *ex nihilo*. Since emanation accounts for producing being *ex nihilo*, it seems to include creating, but emanation is neither voluntary nor non-necessary production. Thus, medieval philosophers face what I call the ‘problem of creation’: they must either (a) deny the apparent contradiction; (b) modify their understanding of creation; or (c) develop an entirely new account of causation that is compatible with creation.

In my dissertation, I examine the causal theories of two prominent philosophers, Avicenna and Aquinas. Both attempt to articulate comprehensive causal theories which include an analysis of God’s creation of the universe. Despite their distinct cultural and religious milieus, both men describe creating as an action performed by God. I examine how

each navigates commitments to his faith tradition and to both Neoplatonic emanation and Aristotelian efficient causation. On the surface, their theories appear similar: they each attempt to solve the problem of creation by selecting option (a). However, this similarity masks underlying differences: each privileges one causal theory in his creation account, and this has implications for understanding their causal theories.

In chapter one, I clarify the problem of creation by discussing each of these traditions in detail. To both Avicenna and Aquinas, solving the problem by selecting option (b) is undesirable, for each would be loath to jettison the claim that God creates either *ex nihilo* or voluntarily. Option (c) is equally undesirable given the medieval inclination to retain as much of one's heritage as possible. Each selects option (a), but they do so in distinct ways that are explored in chapters two and three.

In chapter two, I contend that Avicenna assumes the truth of Neoplatonic emanation as a model of causation in creation, but he explains that Neoplatonic emanation is not incompatible with divine creation. Avicenna does not take every characteristic of Neoplatonic emanation to be essential to that model, explaining that God emanates voluntarily and non-necessarily (that is, God's action is subject to no internal or external constraints). He *also* speaks of creating in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation, although to do so, he must develop (and defend developing) the implications of Aristotle's explication of efficient causation. Efficient causation can be *natural*—involving an agent activating some potentiality in a patient—or *metaphysical*—involving an agent producing being *ex nihilo*. I argue that Avicenna prefers Neoplatonic emanation in understanding divine creation.

In chapter three, I contend that Aquinas assumes the truth of Aristotelian efficient causation as a model of causation, but he explains that Aristotelian efficient causation is not

incompatible with the Christian conception of creating. Aquinas, like Avicenna, develops the implications of Aristotelian efficient causation, and Aquinas understands efficient causation to be an action performed by an agent. Aquinas *also* speaks of creating in terms of emanation, which is both voluntary and non-necessary. Ultimately, Aquinas denies every characteristic of Neoplatonic emanation *except* that (i) God emanates and (ii) God produces being *ex nihilo*. I argue that not only does Aquinas prefer Aristotelian efficient causation as the manner of discussing and understanding creating, but Aquinas strips from his conception of emanation its uniquely Neoplatonic connotations and implications.

In the final chapter, I offer an analysis of Avicenna's and Aquinas's discussions of causation in creation. I offer a careful analysis of their theories of causation, including the relation between Aristotelian efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation. Fundamentally, I make clear that it is overly simplistic to assert that Avicenna or Aquinas have philosophies that are purely Aristotelian or purely Neoplatonic. Both adopt the language of each theory, but they each take pains to clarify what is truly entailed by each theory.

CHAPTER ONE

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I set up the problem explored in this dissertation, namely how Avicenna and Aquinas attempt to explain God creating the universe¹ in philosophical terms, using philosophical concepts that seem not to align with the monotheistic conception of divine creation to which both men subscribe. First, I will examine the monotheistic conception of divine creation, paying particular attention to those numerous points on which Avicenna's Islamic and Aquinas's Christian traditions agree. Given the fact that both traditions rely heavily upon the account of divine creation provided in the Hebrew bible, these similarities are somewhat unsurprising. Next, I will discuss the two prominent philosophical accounts of causation that could be applied to God's creative activity. The first is the broadly Aristotelian account, primarily Aristotle's account of efficient causation, and the second is the Neoplatonic account of causation by emanation. In this chapter, I do not attempt to explicate the historical Aristotle or any one strain of Neoplatonic thought; instead, I discuss the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic models that served as a source for Avicenna's and Aquinas's views. These three traditions—the account of creation derived from the Hebrew Scriptures, along with the two philosophical accounts of causation—shape

¹ In what follows, I use the term 'universe' as a catch-all term meaning the physical universe—the empyrean heavens, the terrestrial realm, and all that populates them—and the immaterial beings other than God (beings that, according to Avicenna and Aquinas, exist). When speaking of a particular part of the universe (such as the terrestrial realm versus the celestial realm), I will specify that I am doing so.

how Avicenna and Aquinas approach explaining how God might have brought about the existence of the universe and what populates it.

II. Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” begins Genesis 1: 1, the first book of the Hebrew bible.² In this section, I address the widespread agreement regarding creation in the two monotheistic religions that I shall be concerned with here, an agreement that is grounded in the Hebrew bible’s account of the origination of the universe. There are three basic tenets common to monotheistic accounts of divine creation that are important for this discussion: that God is the ultimate being; that God creates *ex nihilo*; and that God creates voluntarily. Each of these tenets will be discussed in detail below, highlighting the basis of commitment to these doctrines within Islam and Christianity.

A. Monotheistic agreement

Despite the theological differences among the two monotheistic faiths in question—Christianity and Islam—there exists widespread agreement on several doctrines central to the doctrine of creation and on the doctrine of creation itself. Much of this agreement stems from the reliance of each tradition upon the Hebrew Scriptures for some understanding of God and of creating.³ According to David Burrell, the primary message garnered from the opening chapters of the Hebrew bible is the “specific sense of contingency” of what exists. By this, Burrell means that the Genesis account seems to say that the production of what populates the earth occurs purely because God determines to make it; thus, it seems that if

² Gen 1: 1, *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

³ David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 15.

God did not decide to make something, that thing would not exist.⁴ The overarching theme of the first few chapters of Genesis is the dependency of what exists upon God.

Furthermore, there exists widespread agreement among the Abrahamic traditions both that (a) what God does in bringing forth and shaping new life is good and (b) God deliberately brings about this new life. After God brings forth something new on each day that God works—light, fish, plants, humans, etc.—God is said to have called God’s works good.⁵ The production of beings by God is described as purposeful actions on God’s part, and the result of each of these actions is something good. In this, the creation account in the Hebrew bible is distinct from a number of other accounts of the origination of the universe, one such being the *Enuma Elish*, to which the Genesis account stands in sharp relief.⁶ There, the gods Tiamat and Apsu wage war against each other with the help of their children. Tiamat is slain by the god Marduk, and her body is divided to make the earth and the sky.⁷ In the *Enuma Elish*, the production of the corporeal universe is a byproduct of divine infighting; in the Genesis account, the shaping⁸ and production of the earth is a deliberate act of God to provide a habitable environment for creatures.

From this basic agreement—that what exists is contingent upon God, what God produces is good, and what God produces, God produces deliberately—springs forth a robust doctrine of divine creation. The commonalities between the doctrines of creation in

⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 15.

⁵ See Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31.

⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 16.

⁷ *Enuma Elish*, tablet IV, in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, trans. Stephanie Dalley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 228-277.

⁸ The Genesis account does not, on face value, support the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (despite the fact that each of the Abrahamic traditions endorse creation *ex nihilo*); instead, it addresses God’s shaping of the pre-existing waters and earth. For a discussion of creation *ex nihilo* in Islam and Christianity, see section C below.

the Abrahamic religions can be distilled into three points.⁹ First, God is the ultimate being, which can be understood two ways. God is the ultimate being insofar as God is the first being, and God is the ultimate being insofar as God is the greatest being. This latter type of ultimacy can be described in terms of the *omnis*—omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. As the ‘ultimate being,’ God is the maximally existing, maximally powerful, maximally knowledgeable, and maximally good being. Accordingly, it must be the case that God’s nature is different from human nature in significant ways. Furthermore, given God’s omnipotence, it seems that God must be logically independent of what God creates. If God is *not* logically independent of creation, then God depends on something *other than God*, which, at best, conflicts with God’s omnipotence.¹⁰ Second, God creates *ex nihilo*. Though not clearly articulated in the Genesis text, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* took root in each of the Abrahamic traditions. Each tradition appeals to certain scriptures to bolster the claim that God creates *ex nihilo*, but these scriptural appeals are often augmented by additional philosophical or theological arguments. Third, God produces what God produces voluntarily. Within each tradition, precisely how to understand the voluntariness of God’s creating has been a matter of dispute, and the basic contours of some of these disputes will be explored below. In what follows, I discuss each of these points in greater detail, offering support for each point from Islam and Christianity, the religious faiths of Avicenna and Aquinas, respectively.

⁹ Here, I follow Parviz Morewedge’s analysis of creation in his commentary on *The Metaphysica of Avicenna (ibn Sina)* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 269-70. I have consolidated Morewedge’s list of the essentials of creation from six distinct essentials—God is the ultimate being; God creates *ex nihilo*; God is logically independent of the world; God is conscious of what happens in creating; God can intervene; and God’s nature is not like human nature—into three, retaining the force of Morewedge’s analysis within those three essentials.

¹⁰ At worst, God not being logically independent from the world suggests that God is identical to the world. The identity between God and the world would be undesirable for a Muslim, for example, who believes that God is unique and above all else (See Qur’an 57: 3).

B. God is the Ultimate Being

That God is the ultimate being is a central belief in Islam and Christianity. This belief manifests itself in a number of ways in these traditions: talk of the eternity of God, the oneness or simplicity of God, the greatness of God, the goodness of God, and the power of God. Eternity can be understood in at least three ways (which are not necessarily jointly compatible) by adherents of Islam or Christianity: first, as the claim that God is a being that exists in time and exists as long as time exists; second, as the claim that once God begins to exist, God will not cease to exist; or third, as the claim that God is an atemporal being that is outside of time.¹¹ God, in both Islam and Christianity, is understood to be distinct from the universe.¹² The distinction between God and the universe is manifest in the formal qualities of God—God’s simplicity, for example. Both Christians and Muslims endorse the notion that God is simple in that God is one, and the multiplicity and variety of creatures God produces according to accounts in the Hebrew bible, the Christian scriptures, and the Qur’an imply strongly that the universe is *not* simple.¹³ What support found within Islam and Christianity for the belief that God is the ultimate being will now be explored.

1. Islam

The uniqueness of Allah is emphatically asserted in Islamic doctrine. The first pillar of Islam addresses the unity of Allah. Allah’s Oneness distinguishes Allah from other spiritual beings (such as jinn) and from corporeal beings. There is no other deity like Allah,

¹¹ I do not intend to endorse any specific view of divine eternity; instead, I want to document the presence of the belief in God’s eternity (however it is understood) within Islam and Christianity.

¹² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 5; Burrell makes use of the phrase, “the distinction,” a manner by which Robert Sokolowski discusses the strong distinction Christians in particular have drawn between God and creation. See Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982), especially chapters three and four (pp. 21-40).

¹³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 10. While one can mount an argument for Monism, it should be noted that neither early Christians (who were instrumental in shaping the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*) nor Muslims responding to the Qur’an did so.

and there are no other beings that, like Allah, are entirely simple.¹⁴ To believe in Allah is to believe that Allah is One, perfect, and deserves glory.¹⁵

Part of why Allah is deserving of glory is that Allah is sovereign over all that exists.¹⁶ Allah is sovereign both because Allah is greater than creatures and because Allah has produced all other creatures.¹⁷ In the Qur'an, it says that "[Allah is] Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing."¹⁸ Allah's sovereignty lays bare Allah's power: Allah has produced what exists, and Allah rightfully governs what exists. Everything other than Allah is dependent upon Allah, and this dependency suggests for Muslims that Allah alone—as the supreme being—is eternal.¹⁹

2. Christianity

Christians, like Muslims, echo the Jewish belief that God is One in their own way. Discussions of divine oneness within Christianity typically occur within the context of discussions of the Trinity, the Christian doctrine that God is one substance but exists in three persons.²⁰ The Nicene Creed, a fourth century creed initially produced at the Council of Nicea, which helped to settle orthodox Christian teaching on the divinity of Jesus Christ, begins by attesting to the oneness of God.²¹ The creed reads, "We believe in one God the

¹⁴ Qur'an 3: 2 and 42: 11 address God's uniqueness; 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abdul-Hamīd al-Athari, *Islamic Beliefs: A Brief Introduction to the 'Aqīdah of Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattāb (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005), 78.

¹⁵ al-Athari, 68.

¹⁶ al-Athari, 69.

¹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1964), 9.

¹⁸ Qur'an 42: 11, Sahih International Translation.

¹⁹ Qur'an 39: 62; al-Athari, 121. Here, I follow al-Athari's assertion that God is eternal. By discussing the eternity of God, I mean to indicate a formal feature of God rather than to indicate God's relationship to time. That is, whether God is or is not bound by time, God *always* exists.

²⁰ For an overview of Christian Trinitarian doctrine, see the eponymous chapter in Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

²¹ The text of the creed was later expanded at the council of Constantinople; however, the portion quoted below was not changed at this later council.

Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible,” smoothly moving from the assertion of the oneness of God to God’s role as creator.²²

As in Islam, there is an emphasis in Christian teaching on the sovereignty of God, which highlights God’s power and God’s eternity.²³ “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool,” God is purported to say in the book of Isaiah.²⁴ In the book of Job, God speaks of laying the cornerstone of the earth, of moving the stars through the heavens, and directing the weather.²⁵ In the book of Matthew, Jesus causes an unfruitful fig tree to wither and heals the maladies of men, women, and children.²⁶ God has this sovereignty over the universe because God is greater than God’s creatures.²⁷

C. God makes the universe *ex nihilo*

Despite the lack of direct textual support for the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in either the Christian or Islamic tradition, creation is understood primarily in terms of production out of nothing in each tradition. There are several sayings in the Qur’an that allude to something like creation *ex nihilo*. Within the Christian tradition, there are also several texts that are applied to creation *ex nihilo* by later interpreters. The influence of philosophical arguments regarding the eternity of the universe raised debates within the

²² Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1983), 60. The creed continues, “and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance (*homoousios*) of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things were made” (Davis, 60). By asserting that the Father and the Son share one substance, Christians addressed both the (a) divinity of Jesus Christ and (b) the oneness of God.

²³ Janet M. Soskice, “*Creatio ex nihilo*: its Jewish and Christian Foundations,” in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, David Burrell, et. al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26-7.

²⁴ Isaiah 66: 1, NIV.

²⁵ See Job, chapter 38.

²⁶ Matthew 21: 19; examples of Jesus healing are found in Matthew 4: 23, Mark 1: 41, Luke 13: 13, and John 9: 7, among others. I provide these examples to illustrate that Christians believe Jesus to have power over other beings, a power that Jesus shares with God the Father.

²⁷ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 10.

Christian tradition regarding whether the universe is eternal, and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* figures heavily in those debates.

1. Islam

Within Islam, there has long been the belief that Allah is responsible for producing everything that exists. Muslim philosophers debated whether the ultimate dependence of everything upon Allah means that (a) Allah must have produced something initially *ex nihilo* or (b) Allah must have produced the universe itself *ex nihilo*. The belief that Allah does produce the universe *ex nihilo* receives support from the statements in the Qur'an that say that Allah provides all that exists. Allah is called the "all-Provider," and Islamic theologian al-Athari uses this name for Allah as support for the claim that everything but Allah has Allah as its ultimate source.²⁸

In addition to Allah's role as the "all-Provider," interpreters such as David Burrell and Parviz Morewedge emphasize those passages in the Qur'an that address how Allah brings about the existence of things.²⁹ "Allah says 'be,' and it is," is a phrase repeated in the Qur'an, and Burrell and Morewedge take this phrase to be indicative of creation *ex nihilo*.³⁰ Just as in the Genesis account, Allah is able to speak anything into existence. Since "[Allah] has created everything," it seems that ultimately, Allah is responsible for everything that exists.³¹ Creation *ex nihilo* is one way to express Allah's supreme responsibility for what exists, for even if Allah produced something out of pre-existing material, Allah would have to *also* be responsible for producing that material as well.

²⁸ al-Athari, 78; Qur'an 51: 58.

²⁹ See Burrell, *Faith and Freedom* 151 and 224; Morewedge's commentary in *The Metaphysica of Avicenna (ibn Sina)*, 269.

³⁰ Qur'an 2: 117; 19: 35; 40: 68; See Burrell, *Faith and Freedom* 151 and 224; Morewedge's commentary in *The Metaphysica of Avicenna (ibn Sina)*, 269.

³¹ Qur'an 25: 2; al-Athari, 121-122.

2. Christianity

Christians, too, lack clear, absolute scriptural authority for the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.³² However, as within Islam, the belief that God creates *ex nihilo* grows out of the belief that God is the ultimate source of everything that exists.³³ In response to Gnostic Christians, who, unlike orthodox Christians, did not believe the material world was good, Christians reexamined their doctrine of creation.³⁴ Theophilus of Antioch appeals to Genesis 1: 2—the formlessness of the deep—in his claim that God is the origin of all matter.³⁵ Other Christians applied Romans 4: 17, which says that God “calls into being things that were not”, and Hebrews 11: 3, which says that the universe was “formed at God’s command”, to creation *ex nihilo*.³⁶

Later theologians see creation *ex nihilo* as a corollary to the beliefs that God is simple and eternal. For example, Stanley Grenz asserts that if God is entirely separate from the universe (as orthodox Christians believe), then God must either create *ex nihilo* or not at all.³⁷ Furthermore, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* reinforces the belief that God needs nothing else to create. God has the power to produce being immediately, which means that God can produce being out of no pre-existing matter.³⁸

³² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 16. A scriptural passage that can be used to support the notion of creation *ex nihilo* is Colossians 1: 16, which reads, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”

³³ Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in early Christian thought* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, Ltd, 1994), 26.

³⁴ May, 30-35.

³⁵ Theophilus, *Apology to Autolycus*, trans. Marcus Dods, <http://www.logoslibrary.org/theophilus/autolycus/index.html> (accessed July 24, 2013), II.10; May, 162.

³⁶ May, 27.

³⁷ Grenz, 98.

³⁸ Grenz, 99.

D. God makes the world voluntarily

The final essential characteristic of monotheistic creation is that God produces the universe voluntarily. What it means for God to create voluntarily is that God's creating is dependent upon God's will to create. It is possible that an agent could will to do something necessarily, though God's will to create is often discussed as a *free* voluntary creation. 'Free voluntary creation' could mean either lack of external compulsion or lack of internal compulsion. Alternately, 'free voluntary creation' could mean that God had the ability to do otherwise than God did. In either case, if creating depends entirely on God's essence, nature, or existence, then it seems that creating would *not* be voluntary. God's will must be a causal factor for God's creating in order for divine creating to be voluntary. Within Islam and Christianity, precisely what it means to say that God creates voluntarily has been a source of debate despite the widespread acceptance of the general claim.

1. Islam

Islamic doctrine includes the belief that Allah cannot be compelled by something external to Allah to do something. Because Allah is greater than everything else that exists, it is simply impossible for Allah to be compelled by something outside of Allah. Thus, it seems that Allah creates voluntarily *at least* insofar as Allah is not compelled to create by some external force.

It is possible, though, that Allah is also without internal compulsion. In the saying that "Allah creates what [Allah] wills," it seems that Allah is not bound by any internal compulsion because Allah's will guides whatever Allah does.³⁹ Allah's will is powerful, powerful enough to guide what happens in the universe.⁴⁰ Since Allah determines what Allah

³⁹ Qur'an 24: 45.

⁴⁰ Al-Athari, 120; Qur'an 81: 29.

wills, it seems that Allah might also be without internal compulsion. Thus, creation is free insofar as Allah wills it without external or internal constraint.

The mere lack of internal and external compulsion, however, is not universally taken to qualify Allah's creating as a voluntary action. Al-Ghazali understands the Qur'an to say not *only* that Allah lacks internal and external compulsion but that Allah also is able to create or not create.⁴¹ In his "Aims of the Philosophers," Ghazali condemns other Muslims for denying that Allah could either create or not create.⁴² He seems to say that because Allah's will is powerful enough to determine the outcome of human actions on earth, Allah's will is powerful enough to determine *not* to do something that would be in accordance with Allah's character. For Ghazali and those like him, 'free voluntary creation' would mean an act of creation that Allah could opt not to perform.

2. Christianity

Within Christian teaching on creation, there is a similar dismissal of the notion that God could be compelled to do something by some force outside of God. God is omnipotent, and thus God is not subject to the control of some external being. So, like in Islam, it seems that every Christian ought to endorse the claim that God creates voluntarily and freely at least insofar as God is not compelled to create by some external force.

Christian theologians also regularly deny that God is subject to some internal compulsion to create. Were God to be subject to such an internal compulsion, Grenz notes, God would no longer be separate from the world. What it would mean for God to *be* God would be to create; this means that God requires something in addition to God in order to be God. This thing in addition to God—the universe—would exist as long as God exists.

⁴¹ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 152.

⁴² Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 152.

On Grenz's analysis, this runs dangerously close to collapsing the distinction between God and the world because they must exist concurrently.⁴³ There is no *need* in God to create, as Karl Barth argues in his *Church Dogmatics*.⁴⁴ These theologians seem to believe that God creates voluntarily and freely because God is not subject to internal constraint.

The denial of internal compulsion in God to create, however, does not cleanly solve the issue of divine 'free voluntary creation'. Barth goes on to say that God has no need to create, but because God is a loving God, God will create.⁴⁵ The love of God is a free love, however, because it is not compelled by something outside of God.⁴⁶ Similarly, Grenz asserts that God chooses to create because God is love.⁴⁷ God loves God's own self, and God loves all that God creates. What these accounts of God's creating being rooted in God's love obscure is that God, as an eternal, simple being is also an immutable being; this suggests that God could not be otherwise than God is. And if God could not be otherwise than God is, God could not *choose* otherwise regarding creation than God does. So, while some Christian theologians employ the language of choice, it is not utterly clear that they intend to say that God is *free* to do otherwise than create.

E. Summary

While the accounts may differ with regard to some of the details, the monotheistic accounts of creation found in Islam and Christianity include three key elements. The first is that God is the ultimate being. The second is that God produces the world out of nothing, a doctrine that develops out of the scriptural claims that God speaks and produces being. The

⁴³ Grenz, 100.

⁴⁴ Karl Barth, *Doctrine of Creation*, volume 3 of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 230; Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 8.

⁴⁵ Barth, 230.

⁴⁶ Barth, 231.

⁴⁷ Grenz, 100-101.

third is that God produces the universe voluntarily, that is, that God creating depends upon God willing to create. Voluntarily creating must mean that God is not subject to either external or internal compulsion to create, but it may also mean that God could have done otherwise than create. How this monotheistic account of divine creation aligns with the causal theories available to Avicenna and Aquinas is yet to be seen, and that issue will be explored after examining both causal theories available to them, Aristotelian efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation.

III. Aristotelian Efficient Causation

In this section, I offer an overview of Aristotelian efficient causation. As a major causal theory available to both Avicenna and Aquinas, Aristotelian efficient causation helps shape what Avicenna and Aquinas expect causation to be like. In what follows, I briefly introduce Aristotle's four causes. I then explicate efficient causation, attempting to offer a picture of Aristotelian efficient causation with which Avicenna and Aquinas would have been familiar. Aristotle's presentation of efficient causation involves several components: an agent, a patient, and an action performed by the patient. I will discuss each of these components in detail, explaining that efficient causation can either be natural—the outgrowth of an agent's nature—or volitional—the outgrowth of an agent's will.

A. Aristotelian Causes

In Aristotle's *Physics* book II and *Metaphysics* book II, Aristotle classifies four types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final causes. A material cause is that matter out of which a thing is made. Imagine a bronze statue: bronze is the material cause of the statue. A formal cause is the form in which a thing is made, and the form gives shape and purpose to the matter to which it is joined. The statue has the form of Aphrodite. An efficient cause is

the thing which brings about change in something else. The statue was made by a sculptor, who is the efficient cause of that statue. A final cause is the purpose for which a thing exists, the end for which it is intended. The statue was made to be a paperweight, which is the final cause of the statue.⁴⁸

B. Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Efficient causation merits further attention as a causal theory that may be used to explain the origination of the universe.⁴⁹ In order to understand the attractiveness of this theory for those attempting to explain how God might produce the universe, it is worthwhile to examine efficient causation more closely. This section includes a discussion of the major components of efficient causation: the agent, the patient, and the action performed by the agent.

1. Agent

An efficient cause, Aristotle writes, is the agent that is responsible for bringing about the sorts of changes described above.⁵⁰ Aristotle gives several examples of agents. A person who deliberates, a father, and a physician are all agents who are efficient causes: the person who deliberates makes a decision and acts upon it; the father is the progenitor of a child; the physician brings health to her patient through medical intervention.⁵¹ While each of these agents fit with modern ways of discussing agency, Aristotle also lists semen as an efficient

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* II.3, 7 and *Metaphysics* II.2, 11-12.

⁴⁹ Ransome Johnson argues in *Aristotle on Teleology* that there is a Neoplatonic influence at work on interpreters of Aristotle who interpret Aristotle's Unmoved Mover as an efficient as well as a final cause. For a fuller explanation of his thesis, see *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), especially chapters one and two. See also Robert Wisnovsky's *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 21-144 in which Wisnovsky argues that the Neoplatonists Ammonius and Simplicius are among the first to interpret Aristotle as though Aristotle argues that God is an efficient cause.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Physics* II.3 195a 30.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Physics* II.3 194b 29-31; *Metaphysics* V.2 1013a 29-30.

cause, for the semen is what joins with the menstrual blood and produces a new life.⁵²

Efficient causes are who or what brings about change.⁵³

Agents must be prior to their effect in some way.⁵⁴ A father is prior to his child in two senses: first, he exists before his child exists; and second, he is ontologically prior to his child because his child's existence depends upon the father's own existence. A similar pattern follows for the physician, the person who deliberates, and semen. Each efficient cause must be at least ontologically prior to its effect, but efficient causes can exist simultaneously with their effects as well.⁵⁵

In several of the cases described thus far, efficient causes are distinct from the object upon which they operate.⁵⁶ A father is distinct from his child; a physician is distinct from her patient; sperm is distinct from the new life produced. However, it is possible that in some cases, an agent can be an efficient cause that acts upon itself.⁵⁷ A physician can, of course, practice medicine upon herself to a limited degree, for she can determine likely causes of her illness and act to alleviate that illness. Were she a surgeon, though, it would be unwise for her to be the agent that acts to produce health via surgery!

As the case of the physician illustrates, it is possible for an agent to be a potential efficient cause or an actual efficient cause. A physician has the potential to be an efficient cause of health in herself and others because she has the ability to bring about health by prescribing medicines and certain activities. She is an *actual* efficient cause of health in herself

⁵² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.2 1013b 23-24.

⁵³ Johnson, *Aristotelian Teleology*, 45.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Physics* II.195a 30; *Metaphysics* V.2 1013b 32-34.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle* (New York: Oxford, 1982), 54.

⁵⁶ Barnes, 54.

⁵⁷ Zev Bechler suggests that efficient causes do not differ from the material, formal, and final causes except in cases of external causation. When the physician acts upon herself, on Bechler's analysis, she is an efficient cause; however, she is also acting through the power of her form. See *Aristotle's Theory of Actuality* (New York: SUNY, 1995), especially pp. 50-57.

or others when she *is* prescribing medicines and certain activities. Not every physician is, at each moment in time, an actual efficient cause of health. Similarly, not all semen produces new life, for semen must meet with the *exact* right circumstances in order to do so. Semen, then, is a potential but not actual efficient cause of new life in most circumstances.

The abilities that efficient causes have to produce change are discussed by Aristotle in terms of powers.⁵⁸ Aristotle gives several examples of powers, such as the art of building and the art of healing.⁵⁹ These powers often reside in the efficient cause: an architect, not the skyscraper he designs, has the art of building, and a physician, not the patient she heals, has the art of healing. Sperm has the power to bring about new life, but its power is unrealized except in certain circumstances. In some instances, it is appropriate to talk about the powers of the patient, but these powers in the patient are always powers to undergo certain changes.

Not only do efficient causes have powers to perform actions, but they also exercise these powers either as a result of an agent's nature or as a result of an agent's will. Sperm is an agent that acts by nature—by the very nature of sperm, it will join with menstrual blood (on Aristotle's analysis) to create a blastocyst in the right set of circumstances. Sperm does not *decide* to do create new life; given the right circumstances, sperm *acting as sperm does* will produce life. Our physician acts not by nature but by will. The physician's action requires the physician to decide to act in a certain way. She could decide to try to make her patient better, or she could alternately decide to decline treatment altogether.

2. Patient

The patient is what is acted upon in a change, and hence it is what serves as the matter that underlies the change. Aristotle discusses only cases of efficient causation that

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.12 1019a 15-1020a 6.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.12 1019a 15-18.

involve an agent and a patient, which suggests that the patient is a necessary component of efficient causation. The patient is able to be changed because, Aristotle says, it is a certain way “potentially.”⁶⁰ A lump of clay is actually a lump but is potentially a statue. Menstrual blood is actually a naturally occurring bodily fluid, but it is potentially a new life. An acorn is actually a nut but potentially a tree. In efficient causation, the matter that underlies the change is passive.⁶¹ It must be acted upon by some agent, who actualizes the potency within the patient.

3. Action

An agent actualizes a potentiality in the patient by some action. The agent is the “primary source of change or rest” in the patient, meaning that the agent activates some potentiality either to do or be a certain way or to refrain from doing or being a certain way.⁶² A physician, for example, might actualize the potentiality for health in her patient by stimulating movement in the patient’s digestive system. By the physician’s action, health is restored to the patient. Instead of being in potentiality, the patient’s health now exists in actuality. It is the agent’s act that causes the change in the patient.⁶³ In cases where an agent is a source of “rest” rather than change, the agent prevents further change in a patient. Imagine a chemist mixing chemicals in the lab. By adding the right solution, she arrests the chemical change and preserves the chemical compound of this new mixture. A less benign example might be someone detaining someone else. By physically restraining someone, our agent is now the source of motionlessness—rest—in the person whom he has tied up.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* I.9 327b 23-35.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* I.7 324b 18.

⁶² Aristotle, *Physics* II.3 194b 29-31.

⁶³ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* I.7 324b 13-18.

An efficient cause, then, is an agent that brings about a change in some underlying patient through its action on that patient. An efficient cause must be prior to its cause in some way, and an agent can act by nature or by will. The patient is passive and persists through the change. The agent's action changes the patient, activating some potentiality within that patient. To summarize, an efficient cause C is the cause of some change in patient P if C is in some way prior to P and some action of C brings about change to P.

IV. Neoplatonic Emanation

In this section, I offer an introduction to the Neoplatonic theory of emanation. As a major causal theory available to both Avicenna and Aquinas, Neoplatonic emanation helps shape what Avicenna and Aquinas expect causation to be like, particularly in the context of the production of the universe. In what follows, I briefly introduce Neoplatonic thought. I then explicate the two major Neoplatonic conceptions of emanation, attempting to offer a view of the types of Neoplatonic emanation with which Avicenna and Aquinas would have been familiar. However, from Avicenna's writings, it seems that he was most familiar with the Plotinian strain of Neoplatonic emanation, though he may not have been entirely ignorant of the Proclean strain. Aquinas seems to have been familiar with both strains, though he follows the Proclean strain most closely. Neoplatonic emanation has several important characteristics, namely that the maximally good being emanates, and this emanation is cast as necessary. The emanator produces new being without operating on any patient. Intermediaries are an important part of the process of emanation, and their role in the emanatory scheme helps explain how a universe filled with numerous qualitatively and quantitatively distinct beings comes to exist.

A. Introduction to Neoplatonism

The term 'Neoplatonism' applies to the theories of a group of interpreters of Plato whose interpretations share a number of characteristics.⁶⁴ Two prominent Neoplatonists whose works influence Avicenna and Aquinas are Plotinus and Proclus. In addition, the work known as the *Theology of Aristotle*, one of the works in a series of works referred to as the *Arabic Plotinus*, seems to have influenced Al-Kindi's, Al-Farabi's, and Avicenna's philosophical thought. In the Latin west, the *Liber de Causis*, a work purported to be written by Dionysius that contained many of Proclus's propositions from his *Elements of Theology*, was influential in Aquinas's philosophical thought, as was the *On the Divine Names*, another Pseudo-Dionysian work. In these and other Neoplatonic works, two general concerns that are important for the purposes of this study are manifest. First, the study of metaphysics involves the study of the hierarchy of all beings. The universe consists of a hierarchy of being, and those entities higher up the hierarchy are more powerful than entities lower down the hierarchy. Second, causal explanations appeal to higher entities, and the search for causal explanations involves vertical movements along the hierarchy. So, to explain the existence of entities on one 'level' of existence, one will appeal to entities on a higher level of existence.⁶⁵ In the discussion of Neoplatonic emanation that follows, the presence of these concepts in Neoplatonic thought on emanation will be obvious.

Emanation is deeply engrained within Neoplatonic thought. Neoplatonic emanation begins with the One (*hen*), who is above all intellect, all being, and all perfection. It is impossible to completely describe the One, but it is possible to talk about the One because

⁶⁴ Paulina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

⁶⁵ Remes, 3.

we, as effects of the One, reflect the One.⁶⁶ The metaphysical ‘layers’ of being are proliferated through the process of emanation: the initial emanation by the One produces one ‘layer’ with one entity, and that entity produces another layer, and so on.⁶⁷ Those beings which are metaphysically prior—higher up the chain of being—are more powerful than, better than, and simpler than those beings below them. While Neoplatonists endorse the metaphysical reality of external objects, they assert that everything that exists is connected in some way to the human soul. Thus, understanding the makeup of the universe tells humans something about themselves. In the Neoplatonic worldview, each entity strives for perfection. What is emanated turns toward its emanator, reflecting upon it and attempting to imitate it.⁶⁸ Ultimately, all things will return to the One in the great *reditus*.⁶⁹

B. Facets of Neoplatonic Emanation

Though not entirely monolithic, Neoplatonic emanation has several facets, each of which will be discussed in detail below. Neoplatonic emanation begins with the One: the One emanates, and the reason for this emanation will be explored below. Despite an avowal of necessary emanation by Plotinus, Neoplatonic emanation is often presented as though the One’s emanation is necessary. The One produces new being not by operating on some underlying patient; instead, the new being is produced out of the power and goodness of the One. To explain the varieties of extant beings, Neoplatonists often appeal to intermediary causes between the One and material beings.

⁶⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9.3 49-55; Dominic O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 52.

⁶⁷ Remes, 7.

⁶⁸ Remes, 8.

⁶⁹ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, trans. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), proposition 31; Remes, 51.

1. The One emanates

In the *Enneads*, Plotinus asserts that the one is ultimately ineffable and beyond being.⁷⁰ It is also completely simple—completely unified.⁷¹ The One is entirely complete, and thus it is appropriate to describe the One as perfect. It is possible to discuss the One—albeit in ways that poorly reflect the One’s greatness—because all things that exist are dependent upon it. Insofar as effects resemble their causes, human beings reflect the One.

Plotinus and later Neoplatonists draw upon a principle more specific than that of likeness between effects and their causes. They endorse what O’Meara terms the Principle of Prior Simplicity.⁷² According to this principle, each ‘level’ on the hierarchy of being has a different gradation of complexity. The lower levels are occupied by complex creatures who may be composites of physical matter and soul. As mentioned above, causal explanations involve an appeal to higher levels in the hierarchy of being. The lower, more complex beings are produced by beings that are less complex. The higher a being is in the chain of being, the less complex it will be. Humans, then, are able to consider their own complexity and use this as a starting point to contemplate what the One, which is at the top of the chain of being, must be like.

The One emanates, and the explanation of its emanation often involves an appeal to its perfection or completeness.⁷³ Perfection is associated with goodness by Neoplatonists, and Proclus asserts that the One is identical to the Good.⁷⁴ In proposition 25 of the *Elements of Theology*, Proclus asserts that “whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things

⁷⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9.3 36-45; O’Meara, 54-55.

⁷¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* III.8.9; Remes, 38.

⁷² O’Meara, 62; see *Enneads* V.4.1. 5-15.

⁷³ Note that the Latin *perficio* literally means to perform thoroughly. This word adequately captures the relation between completeness and perfection presupposed in discussions of the One’s completeness.

⁷⁴ Proclus, *Elements of Theology* proposition 13.

which it is capable of producing.”⁷⁵ Though discussing lower creatures, Proclus and other Neoplatonists seem to apply this sort of thinking to the One as well. So this simple, perfect, self-subsistent One emanates, and from this original emanation eventually springs forth beings populating the entire hierarchy of being.

2. The One emanates necessarily

The emanation from the One is often discussed by modern interpreters in terms of necessity.⁷⁶ Approaching Neoplatonic emanation as a necessary emanation requires some explanation in light of Plotinus’s treatise in the *Enneads* on the One’s will and free will in producing being.⁷⁷ There, it seems clear that Plotinus believed the One to have a will. Furthermore, it seems that Plotinus believed that the One’s will is not bound to necessity like human will might be. O’Meara argues that interpreting Neoplatonic emanation as necessary depends upon a too simplistic reading of the images used by Neoplatonists.⁷⁸ Because the issue regarding the necessity (or lack thereof) in the One’s emanation bears on the later discussions of creation and causation in Avicenna and Aquinas, I will discuss support for the standard picture of necessary Neoplatonic emanation by distinguishing several types of necessity and by examining Neoplatonic works that seem to support necessary emanation.

⁷⁵ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 29.

⁷⁶ See, for example, William Hasker’s article, “Creation and Conservation, the Religious Doctrine of,” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or David Burrell’s early work (such as *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1993), 8-9)—note, however, that Burrell has determined his earlier interpretation of emanation as necessary was overly simplistic. In Wilberding’s *Plotinus’ Cosmology*, Wilberding concludes that the emanation is a necessary product of the One. See James Wilberding, *Plotinus’ Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 49.

⁷⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.

⁷⁸ O’Meara, 68.

a. Types of necessity

In his article, “Primary Causation and *ibda’* (*create*) in the *Liber de causis*,” Richard Taylor distinguishes three types of necessity. First, there is extrinsic necessity. In this type of necessity, an agent is bound by external forces to perform a certain action. Second, there is the necessity of nature. In this type of necessity, an agent’s actions are determined by its nature.⁷⁹ Third, there is transcendent necessity. In this type of necessity, an agent’s existence necessitates certain effects.⁸⁰

To determine whether the emanatory scheme described by Neoplatonists depends upon a necessary emanation from the One—and to determine which type of necessity might apply to that emanation—it is helpful to look more closely at Plotinus’s account of free will and the One’s will in the *Enneads*. As O’Meara notes, Plotinus discusses human freedom as a way to understand what freedom in general means. When addressing the higher beings, Plotinus seems to say that acting in accord with one’s nature and striving toward the good are things that higher beings can do freely.⁸¹ When discussing the One, Plotinus seems to say that the One is *above* striving for the Good since it *itself* is the Good.⁸² Since the One is above everything else, it simply cannot be the sort of being that is bound to external constraints. Additionally, the One does not, strictly speaking, *have* a nature because it is above being.⁸³ So,

⁷⁹ In Plotinus’s *Enneads*, Plotinus denies that the One has a nature. In later discussions of emanation—such as in Avicenna and Aquinas—appeals to God’s nature are made despite each philosopher claiming that God’s nature cannot be positively known. The simple denial that God has a nature at all, then, is not a route either takes when discussing whether God produces the world necessarily. In fact, Aquinas attributes to Avicenna the belief that God emanates by nature—something that Plotinus would deny. It seems also that Taylor would deny that *any* Neoplatonist would endorse the view that the One emanates by nature. See his “Primary Causality and *ibda’* (*create*) in the *Liber de causis*” for a fuller discussion of his views.

⁸⁰ “Primary Causality and *ibda’* (*create*) in the *Liber de causis*,” *Wahrheit und Geschichte. Die gebrochene Tradition metaphysischen Denkens. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Günther Mensching*, hrsg. Alia Mensching-Estakhr and Michael Städtler (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), 127-129.

⁸¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.4.

⁸² Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.8.

⁸³ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.8.

when the One emanates, it cannot emanate by nature. Plotinus also says that the One is above will—though he repeatedly describes the One as having and exercising will—so it seems incorrect to say that the One emanates by will, either.⁸⁴ The only remaining way in which the One could emanate necessarily, according to Taylor’s analysis, is if the One emanates simply because it exists. Whether this is the case is the question to which we now turn.

b. Necessity in Neoplatonic Emanation

The One emanates, but *must* it emanate? It seems inappropriate to attribute either of the first two types of necessity of the One’s emanation, but it may still be possible to attribute the third type of necessity to it. From a perusal of Neoplatonic literature—including Plotinus’s *Enneads*—it seems likely that the One does emanate because of this sort of necessity. What it means for the One to *be* the One is to be something that emanates. When discussing whether the One could be otherwise, Plotinus denies that this is possible: to be otherwise would mean that the One was not the best.⁸⁵ It seems that Plotinus would have to respond the same way if asked whether the One could *do* otherwise than it does. To be consistent, it would seem that Plotinus should respond that such a thing is impossible, for to do otherwise than the One does would mean that it would not do what is best. Elsewhere in the *Enneads*, Plotinus talks as though the existence of things below the One is inevitable.⁸⁶ The One’s will—assuming this is an acceptable way to talk about the One—is identical to its existence, which means that even if the One emanates by will, the One could not will

⁸⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.9.

⁸⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.9.

⁸⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.6; A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 98.

something different than to emanate.⁸⁷ Further, the One's emanation of being external to itself is a corollary of its internal contemplation.⁸⁸ To exist and to be what it is, then, the One will emanate.

In Proclus's works, the One's emanation is described in terms of an overflow of being from the superabundance of the One.⁸⁹ What it means, then, for the One to *be* the One is to be the sort of thing that has superabundance. Thus, the One simply is the sort of thing that will emanate.⁹⁰ The One emanates because it is the Good, and it is good for being to be proliferated.⁹¹ It seems, then, that for the One to be what it is, the One must emanate. The One cannot fail to exist *and emanate*. This scenario accords with Taylor's transcendent necessity.

3. No patient

The One produces new being by emanation, and it does not have recourse to any material that underlies this new being. The source of the new being is the One, but upon producing new being, the One is not lessened or depleted in any way.⁹² Because the One produces being from no underlying material, it seems that emanation can be described as *ex*

⁸⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.13 and 14; Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette: Purdue University, 2004), 45.

⁸⁸ Lloyd, 99; Remes, 51.

⁸⁹ Proclus, *Elements of Theology* proposition 30.

⁹⁰ L.M. de Rijk, "Causation and Participation in Proclus: The Pivotal Role of Scope and Distinction in his Metaphysics," in *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, eds. E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer (New York: Brill, 1992), 10-11.

⁹¹ Remes, 43.

⁹² Rijk, 7.

nihilō.⁹³ Lower beings act as representatives of higher beings, for they reflect that which is their cause.⁹⁴

4. Intermediaries

The aforementioned Principle of Prior Simplicity helps explain the attractiveness of the notion of intermediaries in the chain of being. If the cause is better than the effect, then it seems that the *first* cause must be radically better than that which produces material beings. Each effect comes from something less complex than itself.⁹⁵ Again, when discussing the cause of different sorts of beings, Neoplatonists contend that a being ‘higher’ up the chain of being is responsible for that being. Intermediaries populating the chain of being are a helpful way to explain how physical beings can be produced: a simple being produces more

⁹³ Perhaps one might object that emanation is not production *ex nihilō*: just as light comes from the sun, being comes from the One, which means that the One is intimately involved in the production process. The One seems to be what underlies this change, for the One is the “stuff” out of which new being is produced. To this sort of objection, I respond by reminding the objector that the One is not depleted or lessened (or altered) by the production of being. Nothing *of* the One is put into the being that is produced; instead, the being participates in the One in some way. Morewedge suggests that emanation is not *ex nihilō* because emanation is the production of something from one’s own thought. However, this does not entail that there is something out of which the emanated being is constructed; instead, what is emanated is emanated *as a result* of the One’s thought, and in being emanated, it is produced out of no pre-existing, underlying material (Morewedge, *Metaphysica*, 269). If instead an objector suggested that Neoplatonic emanation is not production *ex nihilō* from the perspective of a monist—there exists *one* subject out of which everything is constructed—I would respond in three ways. First, this is not an understanding of being (or emanation) that seems to be endorsed by any of the Neoplatonist mentioned, and I suspect they would each have rejected this supposition out of hand, so to speak. Second, if the monist’s supposition is to be accepted, then the aforementioned reply seems to apply: the Neoplatonic understanding of the production of new being does not diminish the One’s “being” in any way; instead, it involves the production of something new that is not composed of the One’s underlying ‘stuff.’ Because everything is composed of the same ‘stuff’ in monism, it seems that for the One to proliferate beings, the One must use some of the One’s own ‘stuff’ to do so. Neoplatonists flatly deny that the One’s ‘stuff’ is used to produce anything, however. Moreover, if the monist’s supposition is accepted, then the monotheistic belief that there is a distinction between God and the world—that God and the world are made out of different sorts of ‘stuff’—would have to be abandoned (Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 205). Third, the Neoplatonist could challenge the monist regarding whether emanation (according to the monist’s understanding) would involve production of *new* being at all. It seems that at least some monists do not endorse ‘bringing about the existence of some thing,’ for they are not talking about the existence of *x* after (in an ontological, not temporal, sense) the complete non-existence of *x* and of the components out of which *x* is made; instead, they mean the transformation of *y* into *x*. It is true that *x* comes into being, but *x* comes into being and is composed of some pre-existing material (the same material as everything else!). At least in the case of the entities in the highest echelons of the Neoplatonic hierarchy, it is not the case that these beings are transformed out of something that already existed. Instead, new existence springs forth out of nothing.

⁹⁴ Lower beings are also said to participate in their cause(s) by simply having being. See Rijk, 7.

⁹⁵ O’Meara, 46.

complex being, which produces more complex being, and so on until beings that have physical, terrestrial matter as a component of one of their parts.⁹⁶ There remain two important issues to discuss: first, how such intermediaries have the power to produce new beings; and second, whether Neoplatonists all appeal to intermediary emanators.

a. Primary causation

Despite the prevalence of intermediaries in Neoplatonic explanations of the origins of what exists, these intermediaries are not entirely independent causal agents. Instead, the intermediaries are able to bring about effects through the causal power of the One. Its power of causation is in everything that is produced by the One, which means that when something produced by the One produces something else, that third thing is *also* produced by the power of the One.⁹⁷ This cycle of dependence is non-reciprocal: entities ‘lower’ than the One depend upon it, but it does not depend upon them.⁹⁸ Additionally, any entity ‘lower’ than another entity can be said to depend upon the ‘higher’ entity. Ultimately, though, the causal power of the One is present in anything it produces or anything produced by that thing, which means that the power of the One is present in anything that is produced.⁹⁹ Even if there are intermediary entities between, say, humans and the One, humans are ultimately

⁹⁶ Corrigan, 45; Remes, 59-65.

⁹⁷ Michael Wagner, *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus’ Enneads* (New York: SUNY, 2001), 190; Wilberding, 58. See Plotinus, *Enneads* II.4.1 and Proclus, *Elements of Theology* proposition 98.

⁹⁸ Remes, 43-44.

⁹⁹ Rijk, 10. The precise way to understand the presence of that causal power is disputed. One alternative is that the causal power from the One sustains the lower beings, and this sustaining act is enough to attribute causal power to the One. Another alternative is that the One and the lower beings jointly cause the effect of the lower being in question. For a fuller discussion of these alternatives, see Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995) 159-169.

produced by the power of the One.¹⁰⁰ The primary and ever-present cause is the One, and through the One's power, intermediaries are able to act.¹⁰¹

b. Varieties of Approaches

Although Neoplatonists seem to think that intermediaries are useful for explaining how complex beings come into existence, not every strain of Neoplatonic thought appeals to intermediaries in the same way. There are two strains of thought that develop in the middle ages. The first develops out of the Plotinian tradition. The *Theology of Aristotle*, which includes both propositions from and commentary upon Plotinus's *Enneads*, includes intermediaries in the explanation of the existence of the multiplicity of qualitatively and quantitatively distinct beings. Wayne Hankey argues that this appeal to intermediaries to explain this multiplicity occurs because of another principle present in the *Theology of Aristotle*: the notion that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced.¹⁰² Because the One is a simple "being," the One can produce only one simple being directly. This being, in turn, is able to produce something else. This causal chain of production continues until what is produced no longer has the capacity to produce something simple. The hierarchy of being noted above is useful for explaining why, at some point, what is produced will not have the capacity to produce something simple. Each new being that is produced is of lesser metaphysical quality, so to speak, than that which produces it. A useful metaphor is photocopying a copy: if you photocopy a copy, the quality degrades. If you use the most recently produced copy for each additional copy you make, the quality will continue to degrade. Eventually, what is produced

¹⁰⁰ Proclus, *Elements of Theology* proposition 11. See also propositions 12 and 13.

¹⁰¹ Note, however, that this is not occasionalism. The intermediaries *really are* acting, and they *really are* causing things. Their power, though, stems from the One. Without the One's power present in them, they would be able to do nothing (and, of course, they would not exist at all).

¹⁰² Wayne Hankey, "Ab Uno Simpliciter Non Est Nisi Unum: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse*, ed. Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam (New York: Brill, 2007), 316-7.

will barely resemble the original document. A being far down the causal chain of production will be far down the hierarchy of being, and it will lack the capacity to itself produce something simple. At this point, complex beings (or a complex being) are introduced into existence.

In the strain of Neoplatonism emphasizing the Proclean heritage, the principle that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced is de-emphasized. In the *Liber de Causis*, a pseudo-Dionysian work that includes much from Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, there are intermediaries. However, their role is diminished, and there is no direct appeal to the principle that one simple thing can give rise to only one simple thing. Instead, Pseudo-Dionysius appeals to the distinctions between the First Cause, Soul, and Intelligence to explain gradations of being in existence (such as distinctions between humans and other animals). The First Cause is said to give rise to Intelligence, but it is also said to produce Soul as well; that it produces Soul indirectly through the mediation of Intelligence is not always clear.¹⁰³ It is conceivable that Intelligence, for example, could produce multiple things directly. So, while intermediaries are present in both strains, it is not clear that (a) a large number of intermediaries are required or (b) intermediaries are required at all to explain the multiplicity of qualitatively and quantitatively diverse beings in existence.

Neoplatonic emanation, then, is an explanation of the origins of the universe in which an entity that is perfect, simple, and self-subsistent emanates, and it seems that this perfect, simple, self-subsistent entity cannot fail to emanate. Whether directly or indirectly, this emanation leads to the existence of multiple qualitatively and quantitatively distinct beings, including the sorts of beings that exist today. In producing these beings, there need

¹⁰³ See, for example, Dionysius [pseud.], *The Book of Causes*, trans. Dennis Brand (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1984), III.32-33 and IV.37-48.

not be any material out of which to form them—it is possible to bring them forth without an underlying substrate. In short, the causation in Neoplatonic emanation can be summarized thusly: agent E produces effect I if E's existence invariably leads to the existence of I and E initiates an emanation (which involves no underlying patient) that, directly or indirectly, results in the existence of I.

V. Problem of Creation

Avicenna and Aquinas are both committed to upholding the traditional doctrine of creation and are aware of the different causal models distinguished above. As they recognize, however, although each of these models has elements desirable for explaining creation, neither can be adopted without qualification. Precisely why this is the case is explored in greater detail below, and that exploration leads to the Problem of Creation.

A. Aristotelian Efficient Causation and Creation

Aristotelian efficient causation is potentially a desirable way to explain divine creating for several reasons. Components of this causal theory seem to easily cohere to the monotheistic understanding of creation. Primarily, in Aristotelian efficient causation, an agent is responsible for bringing about a change. This agent can, in the context of divine creating, be understood as God. By acting, God brings about the existence of the universe by acting; thus, God is an agent in a manner similar to the sculptor being an agent that produces a statue. God as agent producing the universe precisely aligns with the monotheistic account of divine creating.

Additionally, Aristotelian efficient causation can be used to explain how God, as agent, can bring about the existence of the universe voluntarily. While an efficient cause can act either by nature or by will, the monotheistic conception of creating entails that God

creates voluntarily. The monotheistic conception of creation also includes the belief that God creates *freely* and voluntarily, and Aristotelian efficient causation can be used to explain how an agent can act voluntarily, which is the first step toward showing the action to be free. Thus, Aristotelian efficient causation is attractive way to explain divine creating because it provides philosophical support for the theological convictions that God creates and that God creates voluntarily.

Aristotelian efficient causation begins to be an unattractive way to explain divine creating when one considers the *other* component of change, the patient. In every instance of efficient causation discussed by Aristotle, the agent operates upon some pre-existing matter. A sculptor works upon a lump of bronze rather than producing, from no other matter, the bronze upon which it works. A builder constructs a house out of timber and clay, but the builder must procure those resources rather than produce them out of no other pre-existing material. Even in the generation of new life, there exists material out of which that new life is formed, namely semen and menstrual blood. From Aristotle's account of efficient causation, then, it seems impossible to understand creating as efficient causation because in creating, God produces the universe out of no pre-existing material. God acts upon no patient, which seems to mean that God's act cannot be explained in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation.

B. Neoplatonic Emanation and Creation

Given that Neoplatonic emanation allows for causation without any underlying patient, it seems to allow for a type of causation essential to explaining creation and hence succeed where the Aristotelian model fails. Islamic and Christian doctrine state that in creating, God brings the very being of the universe about in creation. Neoplatonic

emanation fits with the monotheistic conception of divine creating because in emanation, something comes to exist that did not previously exist. In contrast to Aristotelian efficient causation, in which an actor acts on a patient, emanation neither requires nor presupposes the existence of something like a patient in order for God to act. Thus, Neoplatonic emanation might allow Avicenna and Aquinas to bypass any tensions arising between the assertion of creation *ex nihilo* and the Aristotelian account of efficient causation.

The notion of an emanation or flowing forth seems to fit with much of the monotheistic conception of creation. The mode of creation as described in the Hebrew bible and mentioned in the Christian scriptures and the Qur'an does assert that God brings forth these new beings, but it neither includes nor denies emanation as this mode of bringing forth. According to the Hebrew bible, God speaks, and this speech act results in the existence of something new. It is at least conceivable that one can describe what results from this speech act as being the result of an emanation.

The Neoplatonic conception of emanation begins to deviate from the monotheistic conception of creating on the necessity of creating. In the monotheistic conception of creating, creating is a voluntary act of God that is also understood as a free act of God. As noted above, there are some passages in the Neoplatonic corpus that could be used to argue that the One wills what the One does. Thus, it is possible that Neoplatonic emanation can account for the volitional aspect of divine creating. However, given that Neoplatonic emanation is understood as a necessary flowing forth of the One—the One, being the One, cannot fail to emanate—it is not immediately evident that Neoplatonic emanation can account for God's *free* creation of the universe. In fact, it seems implausible that Neoplatonic emanation can account for a free emanation on God's part because the Neoplatonic account

entails that, as a facet of the One's existence, the One must emanate. Neither the Christian nor Islamic conception of God's free creation of the universe align with this Neoplatonic notion that God simply must emanate because God is God. Thus, it seems that Neoplatonic emanation is an unattractive theory of causation for explaining how God creates the universe despite the theory having some useful or attractive features. The centrality of freedom in the monotheistic understanding of divine creating suggests that Neoplatonic emanation would not be a helpful theory for explaining God's creating the universe.

C. The Problem of Creation

What I have termed the 'Problem of Creation' should now be becoming evident. Each of the philosophical theories to which Avicenna and Aquinas have recourse as means to explain how God created the universe clearly align in certain respects but not in other respects with the monotheistic conception of creating to which both are beholden. Explaining divine creating in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation would accurately reflect the beliefs that God acts in creating and that this action is voluntary; however, it seems that Aristotelian efficient causation requires a patient, a requirement that conflicts with the monotheistic conception of God creating *ex nihilo*. Explaining divine creating in terms of Neoplatonic emanation would accurately reflect the belief that God produces new being *ex nihilo*, but such an explanation seems to imply that God creates not because God wills to create but because God must create. Each philosophical theory of causation captures and expresses something important from the monotheistic conception of creating, but each philosophical theory also fails to express something equally important from the monotheistic conception of creating.

In short, Aristotelian efficient causation seems to imply that divine creating cannot occur *ex nihilo*, and Neoplatonic emanation seems to imply that divine creating is something that God must do. It seems that in order to speak of God as efficient cause of the world, one would have to deny creation *ex nihilo*—an important tenet of Avicenna’s and Aquinas’s theological traditions. Because the Neoplatonic theory of emanation seems to entail that the maximally good thing emanates in virtue of what it is—a maximally good thing—such an emanation seems to be a necessary result of God’s essence or existence; thus, it seems *not* to be contingent upon God’s will, which means it is not a voluntary emanation. It seems that, by endorsing Neoplatonic emanation as a causal model of divine creating, one must deny voluntary creating, a central element of the monotheistic account of divine creating.

1. The Problem

It seems, then, that Avicenna and Aquinas have access to causal models that do not fit neatly with the monotheistic concept of divine creating. Creating, as understood in both Islam and Christianity, is the bringing about of existence of the universe by God, who acts voluntarily and who brings about the existence of the universe *ex nihilo*. While emanation fits with creation *ex nihilo*, creation by emanation does not seem to be voluntary. While Aristotelian efficient causation fits with creation being voluntary, such creation would not be *ex nihilo* because Aristotelian efficient causation seems to require a patient. These facts raise what we might think of as the ‘problem of creation’: neither of these causal theories seems compatible with creation, so Avicenna and Aquinas seem to be faced with a difficult choice. They must either

- (a) deny the apparent incompatibility;
- (b) modify their understanding of creation; or

(c) develop an entirely new account of causation that is compatible with creation.

In order to address how God creates from a philosophical perspective, it seems that Avicenna and Aquinas will each be forced to select one of these options.

2. Proposed Solutions

I argue that both Avicenna and Aquinas solve the problem of creation by selecting solution (a), to deny the apparent incompatibility between the monotheistic conception of divine creating and the philosophical accounts of causation. Avicenna and Aquinas address the apparent incompatibility between the monotheistic creation account and each philosophical theory of causation. Although they select the same approach and attempt to solve each apparent incompatibility, their specific methods for solving the problem of creation are not identical.

Perhaps the fact that they each select solution (a) is somewhat unsurprising given some peculiarities of the medieval approach to philosophical thought. Jettisoning any significant portion of their theological or philosophical heritages would likely be undesirable for Avicenna or Aquinas given three closely related beliefs that motivate much of Medieval philosophers' work. First is the belief that all truth coheres. Whatever is true, then, will not contradict other true statements. Within the scope of this project, it is important to note that medieval philosophers believed that if reason, nature (what we might today class as natural science), and religion reveal truth about the world, then those revelations of truth must not contradict each other. The second closely related belief is that different sources or different fields of study can be harmonized. The belief that all truth coheres lead medievals to believe that, when properly understood, different fields of study would not come to radically different conclusions on identical topics. The expectation that truth could not be

contradictory led medievals to attempt to explain how apparent contradictions were not actual contradictions. Additionally, medievals believed that it was worthwhile to hold onto the knowledge gained by those who came before. Retaining the knowledge of their predecessors—particularly work that supported or aligned with their religious or philosophical viewpoint—was desirable for medieval thinkers. The approach to learning—a quest for wisdom and truth—remained important throughout the medieval period in both the East and the West.¹⁰⁴ Islamic philosophers enriched their religious studies with philosophy and natural science.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the medieval period, the inclination to retain as much of one's philosophical and theological heritage as possible was strong.

The option, then, of solving the problem of creation by selecting solution (b), to modify their understanding of creation, would run counter to these medieval inclinations. As noted, it seems that in order to explain creating in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation, one would have to deny creation *ex nihilo*. Given that creation *ex nihilo* is a central component of the monotheistic conception of creating, Avicenna and Aquinas would be purging an important aspect of the monotheistic understanding of divine creating. They would be abandoning an important part of their theological heritages in denying creation *ex nihilo*. However, were they to endorse Neoplatonic emanation as the causal explanation of divine creating, it seems that they would have to deny that God creates voluntarily. The belief in God creating voluntarily (rather than as the result of God's essence or nature) is also central to the monotheistic conception of creating, which means that explaining creation in terms of Neoplatonic emanation seems to also require that Avicenna and Aquinas abandon an important part of their theological heritage. If Avicenna or Aquinas were to pick

¹⁰⁴ Marrone, 16, 20-21.

¹⁰⁵ Marrone, 21.

option (b), it seems that they would need to abandon either the belief that God creates *ex nihilo* or the belief that God creates voluntarily. Because these beliefs are important elements of the monotheistic conception of creating, Avicenna and Aquinas would be altering—perhaps substantially—their understanding of divine creating.

Solving the problem of creation by selecting solution (c), to develop an entirely new account of causation that is compatible with creation, runs counter to these medieval inclinations. While much innovation happens even when medieval cast their views as statements of traditional positions, developing an entirely new account of causation would require them to deny, to abandon, or to contradict central elements of the causal theories with which they were already familiar. In light of the medieval inclination to harmonize and to retain as much of their heritage as possible, this approach would have required them to abandon significant elements of the philosophical heritage embodied in Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought.

c. Perceived Solution

As will be further explored in much greater detail in chapters two and three, I argue that Avicenna and Aquinas each solve the problem of creation by denying that the apparent incompatibility between divine creating and philosophical theories of causation is a genuine incompatibility. While Avicenna and Aquinas both solve the problem by denying the reality of the incompatibility, they do not do so in identical ways. Avicenna addresses the problem raised by the apparent incompatibility of Neoplatonic emanation and divine creating, namely that it seems that Neoplatonic emanation entails that divine creating occur because God must create rather than because God wills to create. According to Avicenna, Neoplatonic emanation *properly understood* does not preclude God emanating voluntarily: God emanates

because God wills to emanate; this emanation does not occur merely as a result of God's nature or essence. Interestingly, Avicenna also addresses the apparent incompatibility between Aristotelian efficient causation and divine creating, asserting that, *when properly understood*, Aristotelian efficient causation must include efficient causation *ex nihilo*. These solutions are examined in great detail in chapter two. The controlling assumptions guiding Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotelian efficient causation are rooted in his conceptions of necessity and of the distinction between being and essence, conceptions that are heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought. So, while Avicenna does answer the problem of creation by denying the incompatibility between creation and each philosophical account of causation, I maintain that his primary focus is solving the problem of *necessary* creation.

Aquinas has a different primary focus. Instead of concentrating on addressing the purported necessity of creation in Neoplatonic emanation, Aquinas addresses creating *ex nihilo*. Aquinas speaks of creation primarily in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation, and thus Aquinas must explain how it is possible for an Aristotelian efficient cause to act without a patient. Aquinas seems to think that a proper understanding of Aristotelian efficient causation entails that one takes *action* to be the primary indicator of efficient causation. Thus, when an agent acts—with or without a patient upon which to act—that agent is an efficient cause. Aquinas also speaks of creation as emanation, though it seems that his understanding of emanation bears little resemblance to Neoplatonic emanation. Both Aquinas's explanation of creation *ex nihilo* as Aristotelian efficient causation and his explanation of creation as emanation are explored in chapter three. Even when explaining creation as emanation, Aquinas makes use of Aristotelian language and concepts, which suggests that the

fundamental way in which Aquinas understands God creating is through Aristotelian terms, as I argue in chapter four.

VI. Conclusion

Avicenna and Aquinas are faced with the daunting prospect of retaining their philosophical and religious heritages while solving the problem of creation, which arises out of the apparent incompatibility of the monotheistic conception of divine creating and the philosophical conceptions of causation embodied in Aristotelian efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation. Though both philosophers solve this problem of creation by asserting that any incompatibility is merely apparent—and offering detailed explanations for why this is the case—their approaches are yet distinct. Avicenna focuses on solving the problem of necessary creation, and in so doing, he is also able to solve the problem of creation *ex nihilo*. Aquinas focuses on solving the problem of creation *ex nihilo*, and in so doing, he is able to solve the problem of necessary creation as well. These distinct approaches to solving the problem of creation reveal different controlling assumptions in Avicenna's and Aquinas's philosophies. Before exploring these controlling assumptions, which I examine in chapter four, it is necessary to study Avicenna's and then Aquinas's explanations of divine creating in philosophical terms.

CHAPTER TWO

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I defend the claim that Avicenna assumes the truth of Neoplatonic emanation as a model of causation and explains that Neoplatonic emanation is not incompatible with creation. Avicenna's creation account reveals that he holds a version of the Neoplatonic emanationist model of creation, but he does not take all of the characteristics of Neoplatonic emanation to be essential to Neoplatonic emanation. Next, I address what appears to be an obvious problem for the application of this model to creation—namely, that creation as emanation seems to be non-voluntary. Finally, I explain the relationship between Avicenna's creation account, understood as voluntary emanation, and ordinary Aristotelian efficient causation.

II. A Neoplatonic Approach

Avicenna presents his account of the Necessary Existent's—that is, God's—creative act in book nine of his *Metaphysics of the Healing*, which is a loose commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Avicenna addresses both the details of Aristotle's discussions of metaphysical topics and the implications of Aristotle's metaphysics. Avicenna begins the *Metaphysics of the Healing* by delineating what the subject matter of metaphysics is. The primary subject is being as such, but a discussion of being calls for a discussion of the production of being. When distinguishing between possible beings—beings which are dependent on something else for their existence—and necessary beings—beings which

cannot fail to exist, which can be necessary in themselves (that is, they cannot fail to exist) or necessary through another (that is, they are dependent beings but cannot fail to exist because of the being on which they are dependent)—Avicenna reasons that all contingent beings have a cause, and this cause is God.¹⁰⁶ A first cause exists and causes the existence of all other beings.¹⁰⁷ This first cause is itself uncaused.¹⁰⁸ This uncaused cause is a necessary being, and Avicenna appeals to the existence of this necessary being to explain the existence of all possible and contingent beings.

Having spent the first several chapters of the *Metaphysics of the Healing* explaining that there is a necessarily existing being that is immaterial, entirely simple, and self-subsisting, Avicenna discusses how beings come to exist which are material, complex, transient, and not self-subsistent. “The being of all things which exist is from the [Necessary Existent],” Avicenna states at the beginning of fourth chapter of book nine of his *Metaphysics of the Healing*, where he begins to explain God’s creative act.¹⁰⁹ God, who is an immaterial being, acts to create by an act of its intellect, specifically by apprehending its own essence. According to Avicenna, because God exists necessarily, God has the best possible existence; here he clearly follows his Neoplatonic forerunners.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* II.2 p. 48 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.1 p. 259 12-16.

¹⁰⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.1 p. 258 35-37. Though the first cause is not here explicitly stated to be God, from the descriptions of the first cause, it is clear that it can be none other than God.

¹⁰⁹ Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia Prima, sive, Scientia Divina V-X* IX.4, translated by S. Van Riet (Lieden: Brill, 1980); the translation from the Latin is mine. *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.1.

¹¹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6.3. The pure good, Avicenna says, is that which exists necessarily. This is so because the good is what everything desires and what completes each thing’s existence. Hence, existence is goodness, and the perfection of existence—obtaining what is desired and completing one’s existence—is the goodness of existence. Because God is the only being which exists necessarily, it has perfect existence. Thus, God is the pure good. Additionally, God is good because it bestows perfections on other things. Because God is the source of all that exists, God is good. See also *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6.3 and 4.

Since God's existence is the best possible existence, God apprehending God's essence is identical to God apprehending "the order of the good in existence."¹¹¹ God apprehends the order of good in existence when God apprehends God's own essence because God's essence *is* the principle of the order of good in existence. As the best possible being—that is, a being which exists necessarily—God is an essence that includes all possible goodness. All goodness, then, is present in God. God recognizes that God's own necessary existence is the best sort of existence, but God also recognizes that things which would exist contingently would also be good. God is able to consider all such aspects of goodness and existence including the potential goodness of possible beings, that is, any being which could possibly exist.¹¹² So, when God apprehends God's own existence, God recognizes the goodness of what exists and the order of goodness in what could possibly exist.¹¹³

God apprehends God's own existence (and, therefore, the good in existence) in one intellectual act. God does not intellectually apprehend God's own existence in an apprehension that moves from potentiality to actuality or an apprehension of one intelligible thing, then an apprehension of another, then another, *et cetera*. If God were to apprehend God's own existence in multiple intellectual acts, then God's initial apprehension would not

¹¹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4.

¹¹² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4.

¹¹³ Avicenna does not consider whether this apprehension of the principle of the good of the order of existence entails multiplicity in God, probably because he does not believe that to be the case. Perhaps Avicenna might reason thus: God is simple, which means that the principle of the order of the good of existence is simple. The threat of multiplicity, in Avicenna's mind, seems to come not from the object(s) of God's knowledge but from the number of acts through which God apprehends those object(s). However, Avicenna apprehends both itself as this principle and those beings whose existence are implied by itself as this principle. God is apprehending itself *and* something else, so it seems that Avicenna must admit that God is apprehending a multiplicity. How can this be the case without there being a multiplicity in God? McGinnis suggests that "the complexity that is in the cosmos is in God but again in a unified and noncomposite way" (204). The complexity of the cosmos is in God as the complexity of an oak tree is stored in an acorn. The acorn itself is homogenous in itself (by which McGinnis *must* mean that the inside of the acorn's shell is homogenous; the acorn itself has a nut, a shell, and a cap, and, possibly, some insect residents), yet complexity resides within it. Similarly, God is a simple being but contains in its simplicity the knowledge of all other possible beings in the knowledge it has of itself. See Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna, Great Medieval Thinkers*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

be fully actualized. Avicenna has already explained that God lacks any potentiality— God is fully actualized—and thus God’s actions must be as well. So, God must apprehend God’s own existence and all corollary information about God’s own goodness and the potential goodness of possible beings in one intellectual act.¹¹⁴

God apprehends both that the order of good in what would exist contingently and that these beings could possibly exist; in addition, God apprehends that the best thing would be for all of these possible beings to exist. Having apprehended the order of good in what would exist possibly, that these possible beings could come to exist, and that it would be good for these things to exist, God brings about the existence of those beings. So, this single intellectual act is the cause of all other beings which exist.

God’s intellectual act causes the existence of these possible beings, Avicenna says, because God’s will is the same as God’s knowledge and power. So, if God apprehends the order of good in possible beings, the fact that possible beings could come to exist, and the goodness of them existing, God wills for these things to be so. Additionally, if God wills for these things to be so, God makes these things so. Thus, God brings about the existence of these possible beings “by way of a necessity of his existence,” and it is a “necessary consequence of his existence.”¹¹⁵ God, apprehending Godself, cannot fail to know that God is maximally good, that God is the principle of the order of good in possible beings, that such possible beings could come into existence, and that it would be good if such beings did

¹¹⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4. By apprehending this at one time, God performs a fully actualized action that does not threaten divine immutability. Further, since all that exists are God and the thought God thinks, Avicenna does not believe that this threatens divine simplicity; God is one, and God thinks one large thought (which seems to be a string of conjoined or disjoined propositions). Perhaps one might object that the thought God thinks entails that there are already a multiplicity of existing things: there is God, and there is the thought. Avicenna does not share this viewpoint. He does not assert that the thought apprehended by God introduces multiplicity into existence; instead, he seems to treat the thought as a property that God has—not something which can properly be said to *exist*. What exists (and exists necessarily) is God.

¹¹⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4; *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* V-X A402 89-90 p. 479: “secundum viam comitandi”, “necesse esse omnibus suis modis”.

exist. Being a necessarily existing being, God necessarily has all of the aspects of God's existence. Since for God to know is to will is to do and since God cannot be otherwise than God is, God necessarily brings about the existence of the universe, by which I mean separated intellects, the celestial realms, the terrestrial realm, and all material beings.¹¹⁶ The universe¹¹⁷ and all that is in it is a "necessary concomitant" of God.¹¹⁸

God brings about the existence of the universe via the emanation of something distinct from God's own essence. This act of emanating, however, does not directly produce all beings other than God. Instead, Avicenna notes that what is emanated is something like God.¹¹⁹ God is a unified, simple being, so what is emanated directly by God must also be a unified, simple being. Because a simple being is (by definition) not composed of parts, a simple being cannot immediately produce a being which can be divided into parts—either

¹¹⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4. That God emanates as a result of its essence is a theme developed by Beatrice H. Zedler in "Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the *De Potentia Dei*" *Traditio* VI (1948): 105-159. Zedler contrasts Avicenna's conception of the creative emanation as a "natural" emanation with Aquinas's conception of the creative emanation as voluntary. Given the discussion which follows in section two of this chapter, Zedler's interpretation seems short-sighted. While Avicenna does say that God emanates because of what it is, Avicenna also asserts that God emanates because it wills to. Thus, it seems incorrect to assert that Avicenna's Necessary Existent emanates as a result of nature rather than as a result of will. See section two of this chapter for a more detailed discussion of this point.

¹¹⁷ As noted in chapter 1, I use the term 'universe' as a catch-all term meaning the physical universe—the empyrean heavens, the terrestrial realm, and all that populates them—and the immaterial beings other than God (beings that, according to Avicenna and Aquinas, exist). When speaking of a particular part of the universe (such as the terrestrial realm versus the celestial realm), I will specify that I am doing so.

¹¹⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.18. "Concomitant" is a technical term; the meaning and usage of this term will be discussed in detail below. For now, suffice it to say that as long as God exists, the universe also exists. Additionally, this process of emanation, it must be noted, is not a process that begins *after* God has existed by itself. According to Avicenna, God is eternal, which means that God self-subsists, is fully actual, and is not bound by time. God cannot change, for change is dependent upon the passage of time. Accordingly, there is no time 'before' the universe began to exist. God emanates for as long as God exists, but this does not make the universe eternal. The universe is *sempiternal* because it is ontologically posterior to God. So, while it is true that the universe always exists, God nonetheless is the ontologically superior being. See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IV.1 p. 124-126; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions*, Vol. 58, *Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science: Texts and Studies*, eds. H. Daiber and D. Pingree, 144 (Boston: Brill, 2005), 90-91.

¹¹⁹ See *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* V-X IX.4, p. 481; *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.5; Wayne Hankey, "Ab Uno Simpliciter non est nisi Unum: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Reverend Dr. Robert D. Crouse*, Michael Treschow, et. al, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 323-328.

into matter and form or into multiple distinct beings.¹²⁰ In order for a multiplicity or for a composite being to be produced, those new beings must come from a producer that has different aspects to its essence. It is these different aspects of an agent's essence that accounts for the diversity in the effect(s).¹²¹ If an agent has a unified being, that agent can directly produce neither multiple beings nor composite beings. Such an agent cannot produce multiple beings because this would involve multiple actions, and multiple actions imply multiplicity in the agent. Avicenna provides two reasons why a unified agent cannot produce composite beings. First, a being composed of form and matter would be produced because the form and the matter correspond to distinct aspects of the agent's essence; since the agent in question is unified, it cannot have such distinct aspects.¹²² Second, Avicenna says that a composite being produced by a unified being would belong to a different class of

¹²⁰ God cannot produce a being that is composed of matter and form because such a being would have composite parts. Additionally, even if it were possible for God to produce a material being, God would not do such a thing. Matter is passive, Avicenna says, and thus it would be impossible for a material being to cause the existence of other beings. Further, Avicenna asserts that the being which God creates must be permanent, and a material being comes to be from matter and form. The so-called permanent part of a material being is its form, and thus even if a material being could cause the existence of other beings, the material being would be doing what, properly speaking, only its form can do. See *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.8.

¹²¹ *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.5.

¹²² *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.5.

beings than the agent, for no material being can be a unified being.¹²³ Because God's essence is unified, God cannot be a producer of a multiplicity or of a composite being.¹²⁴

Accordingly, God can emanate one simple being—a being which is one in number, simple, and immaterial. This being is called the First Intellect.¹²⁵

A. Additional Emanations

As a result of God's emanation of the First Intellect, two simple, immaterial beings now exist. Despite the fact that the First Intellect is like God, God and the First Intellect are fundamentally different. God is a being whose existence does not depend upon any being: God does not owe God's existence to any other being, and God is self-subsistent.

Accordingly, Avicenna calls God a being that is necessary in itself. The First Intellect is a being whose existence depends upon another being, namely God. Avicenna calls this type of dependent being a being that is possible. Because the First Intellect is dependent upon

¹²³ See *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.18. Avicenna asserts that a unified being cannot produce a composite being because that composite being would belong to a different species than the unified being. The unstated principle upon which he relies is Aristotle's principle that a being always produces its like; that is, a dolphin can produce a dolphin but not a horse. It might seem that Avicenna is saying that an immaterial being cannot produce a material being; however, this is not an accurate interpretation. Instead, he says that a *simple* being cannot produce a material being. He acknowledges that the Intellects are not entirely simple—they are possible in themselves and necessary through another—and this multiplicity in their natures allows them to produce something corporeal (the celestial spheres and, eventually, the terrestrial sphere).

¹²⁴ See *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.7 for Avicenna's arguments regarding why God must be one simple being. See also chapter 38 in Avicenna's *Metaphysica*, in *The Metaphysica of Avicenna: A critical translation-commentary and analysis of the fundamental arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysica in the Danish Nama-i 'ala'*, trans. Peter Morewedge (New York: Colombia, 1973) (henceforth, *Metaphysica*) for further discussion of the principle that from one simple being, one simple being can be emanated. According to Hankey, Avicenna emphasizes the likeness between the emanator and what is emanated. Because what is emanated is like the emanator, what is emanated must have some properties similar to the properties of the emanator. God, as a necessarily existing being, can only have certain properties: it must be self-subsistent, simple, and a single, unified being. What is emanated cannot be self-subsistent, for it is originated by another being. However, it must be simple and a single unified being if it is to be like God at all. As a result of his adherence to the principle that the effect must be like the cause, Avicenna argues that from a simple, unified being, only one thing—another simple, unified being—can be produced. This principle, *ab uno simpliciter non est nisi unum*, deviates from Farabi's understanding of the emanation from the First [being]. Farabi stated that the First directly emanates all that exists, and many of these beings are *unlike* the First in that they are corporeal (and thus not simple). See Al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State: Abu Nasr Al-Farabi's Mabadi' ara' ahl al-medina al-fadila*, transl. R. Walzer (Oxford: Oxford, 1985), 95, 112. See Hankey, 323-326 for a continued discussion.

¹²⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4-6.

something else for its origination, when considered in itself, the First Intellect could either exist or could not exist. It does not have the power to bring itself into existence.¹²⁶

Avicenna also considers the First Intellect's existence from the perspective of God. God cannot fail to bring about the existence of the First Intellect, and thus the First Intellect's existence, when considered from the perspective of the relationship between God and the First Intellect, is necessary. Once a being that is necessary through another comes into existence by the powers of this other agent, it continues to exist by the power of its originator. So, the First Intellect is a being which is necessary through another and possible in itself: it is a being that is necessary through another because it is dependent God for its existence (but God cannot fail to bring about the existence of the First Intellect), and it is a being possible in itself because it exists but does not have the power to bring itself into existence or keep itself existing.¹²⁷ Despite the fact that the First Intellect is like God insofar as it is a simple, immaterial being, the First Intellect differs from God because God is being which is necessary in itself while the First Intellect is a being which is necessary through another and possible in itself.

The source of numerical multiplicity *and* qualitative difference that can be seen in the universe must still be explained. From God originates multiplicity and qualitative difference insofar as God emanates the First Intellect. From the First Intellect, however, originates multiplicity and qualitative difference found in the celestial and terrestrial universe insofar as

¹²⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 31 7-38-p. 33 1-20.

¹²⁷ Avicenna distinguishes between two modalities of being: those which are necessary and those which are possible. A being can be necessary through itself or through another. A being that is necessary through itself is a being that cannot fail to exist. It exists and subsists through its own power. A being that is necessary through another is a being that is brought about by another agent and is sustained by that agent. A possible being can be a being that can either exist or fail to exist. A possible being is a non-necessary being. According to Avicenna's schema, a being that is necessary through another is *also* a possible being insofar as it could theoretically not exist. Its essence is dependent on another, just like any other possible being. A being that is necessary through another, though, will not fail to exist. For why this is, see section C below, where Avicenna's theory of efficient causation is explored.

the First Intellect emanates a plurality. The First Intellect, being intellect, contemplates its own existence and the existence of God. As a result of this reflection, there arises a plurality in the First Intellect.¹²⁸ The First Intellect intellectually apprehends its own existence and the existence of God. When the First Intellect considers its own existence, it apprehends that its existence is necessary through another but possible in itself. Apprehending its existence as a possible, dependent existence, the First Intellect emanates a celestial body, namely the outermost sphere of the stars. It is because the First Intellect intellectually grasps its own dependent existence that it emanates the outermost celestial sphere and the matter of which it is composed. Avicenna associates matter with potency, and thus the material celestial sphere arises from the First Intellect's apprehension of its own (limited) potentiality.¹²⁹

Apprehending its existence as necessary through another, the First Intellect emanates the soul of this outermost sphere. The First Intellect recognizes that although it is a dependent being, it is a dependent being that cannot fail to exist from the perspective of God. As a result of this recognition, the First Intellect emanates something immaterial, namely the soul which inhabits the outermost sphere of the stars. This immaterial soul

¹²⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.19. Here, I disagree with McGinnis. McGinnis asserts that God *made* the First Intellect with multiplicity inherently in it. Avicenna contends that the First Intellect is, like God, an entirely simple being. The multiplicity of the First Intellect does not, Avicenna asserts, come from God. Instead, the multiplicity of the First Intellect is a result of the ontological status of the First Intellect. Unlike God, which is a being that is necessary in itself, the First Intellect is originated by another being. So, even though the First Intellect is necessary through another, it is still a possible being. Even though it is necessary through God, the First Intellect, when considered in itself, could either exist or not exist. When the First Intellect realizes this fact about itself, the First Intellect emanates. So, from one perspective—that is, the perspective of the First Intellect's essence—the First Intellect is simple. From another perspective—that of the First Intellect's ontological status—the First Intellect is not simple. The First Intellect's ontological status is what leads to the First Intellect emanating both its sphere and the soul of that sphere. I do not think that Avicenna believed that the First Intellect was a complex being as emanated from God. Any complexity in the First Intellect is dependent on a matter of perspective rather than an essential feature of its essence. Further, Avicenna is clear that the multiplicity in the universe originates *from* the fact that the First Intellect has this dual ontological status not *with* the fact that the First Intellect has this dual ontological status. That is, Avicenna says that the First Intellect being both necessary (in one way) and possible (in another) gives rise to multiplicity and qualitative difference; the First Intellect's ontological status is not presented by Avicenna to *be* that multiplicity and qualitative difference. See McGinnis, 204.

¹²⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, §53 p. 99.

reflects the circumscribed necessity of the First Intellect's existence; God cannot fail to bring about the existence of the First Intellect, and thus the First Intellect is necessary through another.¹³⁰

Apprehending the existence of God, the First Intellect emanates the Second Intellect.¹³¹ Its reflection upon the fact that God's existence is necessary in itself causes the First Intellect to emanate a being that is similar (in some ways) to God. The First Intellect emanates an immaterial, simple being that has powers of intellection; however, because the First Intellect apprehends the existence of God imperfectly, this Second Intellect is a lesser being than the First Intellect. There now exists both qualitatively and quantitatively different beings: God, the First Intellect, the outermost celestial sphere and its soul, and the Second Intellect. From this initial plurality—which is does not arise because of any plurality in the essence of God—it is possible to derive the multiplicity of qualitatively different things found in the universe including what is found in the terrestrial realm.

Although the First Intellect emanates a multiplicity of things with qualitative differences, this emanation does not directly result in the existence of the each of the celestial spheres or the terrestrial universe. The terrestrial realm arises after a chain of emanations from the Intellects. The Second Intellect, also being intellect, goes through a process of intellectual apprehension similar to that of the First Intellect. When the Second Intellect considers itself as a possible being, as a being necessary through another, and then considers God, it emanates a second sphere of the heavens, the soul of that sphere, and a Third Intellect, respectively. This process continues until ten intellects have been

¹³⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.11.

¹³¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.11.

emanated.¹³² The tenth is the Agent Intellect, also known as the Giver of Forms.¹³³ For Avicenna, the metaphysical distance, so to speak, between the Agent Intellect and God is so great that the Agent Intellect cannot emanate a heavenly sphere.¹³⁴ According to Avicenna, the later emanations have less reality and more dependency than the former emanations. Thus, the Agent Intellect lacks the reality to emanate a heavenly sphere and instead emanates a terrestrial sphere, the lunar sphere. In addition, it emanates the soul of the lunar sphere. Given the metaphysical distance, so to speak, between the Agent Intellect and God, the Agent Intellect does not have the ability to emanate something entirely immaterial. So, the Agent Intellect emanates mixed beings—beings that are both material and immaterial.¹³⁵ These possible beings require a substrate to exist, which accounts for the matter of the matter-form composite.¹³⁶ It is these possible beings which are subject to change.¹³⁷ According to Avicenna, the emanative process cannot continue *ad infinitum* because lesser emanations lack the ability to emanate immaterial beings.

The existence of multiple beings and qualitatively different beings and the universe which they populate, then, can ultimately be traced back to God. God is the ultimate but not direct cause of all that exists. God directly causes the existence of neither the celestial realms,

¹³² Avicenna does not consistently assert that ten intellects are produced. In his *Danishnama 'alā'i*, for example, he does not number the emanations. Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, §39 p. 78-79.

¹³³ As Kara Richardson mentions in her dissertation, *The Metaphysics of Agency: Avicenna and his Legacy*, Avicenna does not use the name “Giver of Forms” regarding the Tenth Intellect in *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.5; however, Avicenna describes the work of such a being as giving forms in *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.2. Thus, it seems that the principle who bestows forms must be the same principle as the Agent Intellect. See Kara Richardson, “The Metaphysics of Agency: Avicenna and his Legacy” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2008), 6-7. Richardson is responding to Jules Janssen’s article “The Notions of *Wāhib al-Suwar* (Giver of Forms) and *Wāhib al-'Aql* (Bestower of Intelligence) in Ibn Sīnā,” In *Actes du XIe Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale de S.I.E.P.M., 2002*, eds. M. Pacheco et J. Meirinhos. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 551-562.

¹³⁴ In the *Danishnama 'alā'i*, Avicenna states that the more potentiality a being has, the farther it is from the primary being. Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, §53 p. 99.

¹³⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4; IX.5.

¹³⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IV.2.

¹³⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.19.

the terrestrial realm, or all other beings (whether material or immaterial), but God does produce the being that initiates the chain of production that results in the existence of additional Intellects, the celestial realms, the terrestrial realm, and what populates the terrestrial realm. Each of the Intellects are causes in their own right, for each produces either a celestial or terrestrial realm and the soul of that realm. The Giver of Forms directly produces not only the lunar realm and its soul but also the beings that populate that realm. God is the ultimate but not immediate source of all that exists—immaterial beings, celestial realms, the terrestrial realm, and material beings. Everything else that exists other than God exists as the result of God's action and the unfolding of that action.¹³⁸

Avicenna's account closely matches the account of medieval Neoplatonic emanation given in the previous chapter. An emanation from God explains the origins of beings other than God; God, a simple being, can emanate only one simple being; the Intellects act as intermediaries, and it is through the emanation of these intermediaries that the physical universe is created. Further, it appears that God's emanation is necessary: God emanates because it apprehends its own goodness, which, as an intellectual being who is maximally good, it cannot fail to do.

B. Emanation as Voluntary

From the account above, it seems that Avicenna asserts that God emanates *necessarily*, that is, God cannot fail to emanate the First Intellect. If God plays a role analogous to Plotinus's Good, then God must emanate. In discussions of whether God emanates necessarily, attention is most commonly drawn to whether God must emanate because of

¹³⁸ For a discussion of how God is ultimately responsible for all that exists in the texts of the Arabic Plotinus, see Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London: Duckworth, 2002), 137-149. Contrary to Adamson's reading of the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna does not expressly state that God is directly responsible for all that exists; instead, he states that God is *ultimately* responsible for all that exists.

some feature of God's nature. Since God's will is identical to God's knowledge and God's essence, then it seems that God cannot fail to emanate precisely because of what God's essence is. This line of thought—that God emanates necessarily because of some feature of God's nature—is defended by Beatrice Zedler, among others. Zedler contends that since Avicenna's God can emanate only one simple thing because God is a simple being, God emanates by nature rather than by will. She also contends that Avicenna specifically denies that God *intends* to emanate, and thus God does not emanate voluntarily.¹³⁹

If Zedler's interpretation is correct, then Avicenna faces a serious problem: his account of God's creative act as a necessary emanation directly contradicts his Islamic heritage. According to Islamic doctrine, Allah voluntarily creates all that exists. Creating is voluntary because Allah wills to create: Allah creates because Allah decides to create. In the Islamic account of creation, creating is also spoken of as voluntary because Allah did not have to create: Allah creates voluntarily because there is no compulsion, either internal or external to Allah. However, it seems that according to initial cursory explication of Avicenna's account of creation, God neither wills to emanate nor could have refrained from emanating. In the account given above, Avicenna refers to God's apprehension of Godself—not God's will—as the origin of the emanative act. Further, Avicenna's account makes clear that God is a necessary being, which implies that God could not be different than God is. If so, God would not emanate voluntarily; instead, God would emanate necessarily because God is *the* necessary being.

¹³⁹ Beatrice H. Zedler, "Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the *De Potentia Dei*," *Traditio* VI (1948), 105-159. For others assuming that a thing emanating by its nature implies necessity, see any of the following: Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995), 110-11; Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Creation: Writings on the 'Sentences' of Peter Lombard, Book 2, Distinction 1*, trans. Steven Baldner and William Carroll (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), "Introduction" by translators, 1-20; Wayne Hankey, "Ab Uno Simpliciter non est nisi Unum: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Reverend Dr. Robert D. Crouse*, eds. Michael Treschow, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 325.

Given that Avicenna describes himself as a Muslim and describes God's causation in creation in terms of Neoplatonic emanation, Avicenna faces a difficult choice: either jettison the Islamic conception of voluntary creation or deny that a Neoplatonic emanationist account of creation entails that creation is necessary. Avicenna opts for the latter; he describes a role for God's will in emanation, and he denies that God creates due to some necessity, specifically a necessity owing to God's nature. Avicenna directly address whether God emanates by will or by nature, and he indirectly addresses whether God emanates voluntarily or necessarily. To see how Avicenna includes a role for God's will in emanation, we must first explore what the divine will is like according to Avicenna. We will then discuss the distinction Avicenna draws between an agent acting from God's nature or from God's will. Avicenna draws a further distinction between a willing an action and intending an action that plays an important role in the debate regarding whether God wills to create. Finally, these concepts will be brought together in a discussion of whether God *willing* to create means that God creates *voluntarily* in that God wills to create without compulsion.

1. Divine Will

For Avicenna, the attributes of God are identical to the being of God. God is a changeless, simple, immaterial being; as an intellect, God intellectually apprehends Godself.

¹⁴⁰ So, God's intellect is identical with God's knowledge, and both are identical to God's essence. God's will, then, is also identical to God's knowledge and intellect and essence.¹⁴¹

Accordingly, since God is simple, God has one intellectual act, which is also God's act of will. God knows Godself and wills God's own existence.¹⁴² That the divine attributes are identical reveals that God's will is (a) simple, meaning that God has one (and only one) act of

¹⁴⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 291 7-17.

¹⁴¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 295 29-36.

¹⁴² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 291 7-11; see also VIII.7 p. 292 5-9.

will; (b) eternal; (c) immutable, meaning that God's will cannot change; (d) self-directed, meaning that God wills only Godself directly; (e) unique, meaning that God's will, unlike human wills, has no final cause and depends upon nothing external to itself.¹⁴³

The simplicity, eternity, and immutability of the divine will are relatively straightforwardly related to the other divine attributes. Avicenna explains that God's will must be simple because God is simple. God has one act of will, and because God is eternal, God's act of will is eternal. The fact that God's will is immutable follows from the fact that God is pure act. Were God's will to change, God would move from potency to act in some way.¹⁴⁴

That the divine will is self-directed and unique deserves further exploration. Regarding the self-directed nature of the will, Avicenna notes that divine knowledge is self-directed. In God's one intellectual act, God intellectually apprehends Godself. Insofar as God knows other beings, God knows them as the effects of its causation, for to know the cause is to know its effects.¹⁴⁵ This knowledge of other beings is not separate from God's self-knowledge: by knowing Godself, God knows Godself as the principle of existence of everything that exists.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the will is entirely self-directed. God wills and loves Godself. God wills God's own existence.¹⁴⁷ Just as God knows other beings by knowing Godself, God wills the existence of other beings by willing Godself. God does not explicitly or directly will anything except God's own existence, but as a result of willing God's own

¹⁴³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7, passim. In constructing this list, I build upon Rahim Acar's analysis in his article, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," *The Muslim World* 94 (2004), 67 and his book, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 291 7-15; VIII.6 p. 288 1-4.

¹⁴⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6 p. 287 15-17; Avicenna, *Metaphysica* §29-32, p. 60-66; § 38 p. 76-78; Michael Marmura, "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82.3 (1962), 302.

¹⁴⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6 p. 288 8-14.

¹⁴⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 292 1-9.

existence, God causes the existence of other beings. God's will is entirely self-directed, and any additional effects of that volitional act are ancillary effects.¹⁴⁸

The self-directed nature of the will helps one explain how the divine will is unique. Unlike humans, who will something for a particular end or benefit, God is not influenced by such desires. God's will has no final cause—some reason or good for which it is willed.¹⁴⁹ God does not will God's own existence for some purpose, for if God's will had some purpose, then God would be seeking to complete some deficiency God had. But because God is perfect—beyond perfect, Avicenna says—God cannot (by definition) be in need of any completion.¹⁵⁰ Because God wills and loves Godself, God's will has only Godself as an object. Having only Godself as an object, God's will is independent of any other being.

2. Acting from Natural Necessity versus Acting from Volition and Intention

While there is broad agreement regarding the characteristics of God's will, such broad agreement does not extend to the role God's will plays in emanation. From the first few paragraphs of Avicenna's explanation of divine emanation, some have argued that God's will does not play a role in emanation at all.¹⁵¹ Instead, they argue that Avicenna presents emanation as though it was necessitated by God's nature. Their proposal rests upon a misunderstanding of the distinction Avicenna draws between an act done by nature, an act done voluntarily, and an act done by intention to argue thus.

An agent performs an action by way of its nature when the agent's nature is the principle of its action. An act performed by way of an agent's nature has two characteristics. First, such an act does not involve the agent's knowledge (*ma'rifa/cognitionem*). Second,

¹⁴⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 295.1-14.

¹⁴⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 292 1-8.

¹⁵⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6 p. 283 9-10.

¹⁵¹ Zedler, 105-159.

such an act does not involve the agent's approbation or consent (*ridā/beneplacitum*).¹⁵²

Instead, the agent produces its effect in a manner similar to how fire begets fire. When fire spreads, it does so by its nature: fire devours combustibles whenever the appropriate circumstances (that is, there is enough oxygen; there is sufficient airflow; etc.) arise. Fire can neither know nor consent to its act; fire does what it does because it is what it is. When an agent acts by nature, then, it neither knows nor consents to the action it performs.

In contrast, an agent performs a voluntary action when the agent (a) has knowledge of the action and (b) consents to the action.¹⁵³ Avicenna's definition of voluntary action entails that only cognizant or intellectual beings could possibly perform voluntary actions. If an agent is incapable of having knowledge of the action it is performing, then the agent cannot act voluntarily. Avicenna, then, denies that plants can act voluntarily. He also implicitly denies that an intellectual agent acts voluntarily when that agent is not cognizant of the action it performs. An example that illustrates this difference is as follows: a dog is not acting voluntarily when, while sleeping, the dog's nose twitches or paws move. If that dog—in a particularly deep sleep—manages to bark while asleep and then awakens suddenly and begins searching for that barking dog who woke him, it quickly becomes obvious that the dog had no knowledge of his action as *his* action. Clearly, the dog does not know that *he* woke himself up by barking. Thus, on Avicenna's analysis, the dog's action cannot be

¹⁵² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 1-3; *Liber De Philosophia Prima* IX.4.

¹⁵³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 1-3; *Liber De Philosophia Prima* IX.4.

voluntary because the dog did not have knowledge of it.¹⁵⁴ So, while only cognizant or intellectual beings can meet the knowledge requirement, not every cognizant being (or every cognizant being's action) does meet the requirement.

Along with knowledge of the action, an agent performing a voluntary action must consent to the action being performed. This second criterion helps to clarify that coerced actions—someone being forced to assist bank robbers, for example—are not voluntary actions. While the agent may have knowledge that they are helping rob a bank, the agent likely does not consent to or approve of the act of helping rob a bank.¹⁵⁵ Avicenna seems to link the lack of impediment or aversion in an agent's essence to consent.¹⁵⁶ If an agent's essence does not include any impediment or provide any aversion to an action *and the agent performs the action*, then the agent consents to the action.¹⁵⁷

In light of the distinction Avicenna makes between actions performed by nature and actions performed voluntarily, one can see how actions performed by nature can be

¹⁵⁴ Imagine another scenario: a dog it is asked to choose which owner it prefers when its owners end their romantic relationship. What the dog experiences is two individuals calling him by name and asking him to come to them. If the owners—let us call them Jerry and Keisha—are each standing at opposite ends of the room and the dog—let us call him Buster—is in the middle, what Buster experiences is Keisha calling him and Jerry calling him. Buster can choose to go to either Keisha or Jerry, but there is nothing to indicate that Buster is able to understand that by going to Keisha, Buster will be living permanently with Keisha. The fact that canines have limited cognitive capabilities suggests that their actions will not always be voluntary. Dogs do not always have knowledge of their actions.

¹⁵⁵ A more difficult case is a person who suffers from a disorder similar to Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS). During an RLS attack, a person experiences symptoms ranging from tingling discomfort in her legs to the spontaneous movement of her legs. She knows what her legs are doing, but she does not consent to the action. In this case, it seems that the action is not voluntary.

¹⁵⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 9-10; *Liber De Philosophia Prima* IX.4.

¹⁵⁷ McGinnis offers a similar explanation of Avicenna's notion of consent. See his *Avicenna*, 207. What is unclear is whether Avicenna's definition of voluntary action includes actions that a person performs while giving little conscious thought to those actions. An action performed by habit—checking your blind spot before changing lanes while driving; straightening a stack of books sitting on your desk; etc.—may not require conscious thought from the agent. Because Avicenna stresses that consent involves the lack of impediment or aversion to the action in the agent's essence, it seems likely that such habitual actions would classify as actions done with the agent's consent. As long as the action is not contrary to the agent's nature and the agent performs the action, the agent consents to the action.

associated with necessity.¹⁵⁸ An agent who performs action by nature cannot control her action because she cannot also control her nature. Her nature, then, determines which actions she performs. So, it seems that her actions are necessitated by her nature. A volitional action, however, is performed by an agent when the agent has knowledge of the act and the agent's essence lacks any impediment or aversion to that act. The agent's nature is important when the agent acts voluntarily because only certain actions are live possibilities for agents with certain natures, but the agent's knowledge is equally important.¹⁵⁹

Although Avicenna writes that a volitional act, generally construed, occurs when an agent has knowledge of the act and consents to the act, Avicenna distinguishes volitional acts from intentional acts. An intentional act is a specific type of volitional act. Avicenna lists three criteria for forming an intention, and says that an intentional act is simply the action that carries out this intention. First, to form an intention, there must be something distinct from the agent.¹⁶⁰ An agent cannot form an intention without intending x , x being something distinct from the agent. Intention cannot be self-reflexive. This thing which is the object of the intention is said to be the cause of the intention in this sense: without that x , the agent would not intend x . In the case of a human agent, a person intends to learn a foreign language. The object of the intention is the acquisition of the knowledge of this foreign language.

The second criterion for intending is simply that the agent actually forms the intention in question. To do so, the agent acts to form that intention. Avicenna writes that there must be some act by which the intention is acquired by the agent. This criterion seems

¹⁵⁸ It might yet seem like an action could be voluntary but also necessary—an agent could know and consent to an action but that action had to be performed nonetheless. This possibility is discussed in section 3 below.

¹⁵⁹ Zedler is one who speaks of “natural necessity.” See 105-159.

¹⁶⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 32-35.

obviously—almost trivially—true, for in order to intend something, an agent must form an intention. In the case of our human agent, the person must form an intention to learn a foreign language.¹⁶¹

The third criterion for intending is that there is some benefit for which the thing is intended. So, Avicenna asserts that if an agent intends something, that agent does so because the agent will benefit in some way from the intention being carried out. A person who intends to learn a foreign language will acquire some benefit from learning the language. The benefit could be a good grade in a class, a new way to impress potential romantic interests, the ability to translate an interesting text, or any number of other benefits one might acquire by learning a language. Intentions, then, always have an object of the intention, an act by which the intention is acquired, and a benefit toward which carrying out the intention aims.¹⁶²

These three types of actions—an action done by nature, a volitional action, and an intentional action—are the potential ways in which God could have brought about God's creative emanation. Avicenna considers whether God emanates either by intention, by nature, or by will. He is quick to dismiss the notion that God emanates by nature, and he also dismisses the notion that God emanates by intention.¹⁶³

God does not emanate by nature. Since an action performed by nature is an action that occurs without the agent's knowledge and without the agent's consent, God would have to emanate without knowledge of the emanation and without consenting to the emanation. According to Avicenna, God intellectually apprehends Godself. Included in this self-apprehension is the apprehension of Godself as the principle of everything else that might

¹⁶¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 32-35.

¹⁶² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 31-35.

¹⁶³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326-327 17-35; 1-17.

exist. God knows Godself, and in knowing Godself, God knows that God is the cause of the existence of anything which might exist. In knowing Godself, God knows everything that is a concomitant¹⁶⁴ of its existence.¹⁶⁵ Because God has this knowledge, God fails to meet the first criterion of an act by nature.¹⁶⁶

God also fails to meet the second criterion of an act by nature, for God does consent to the emanation. God is free from any impediment to emanating, and thus God consents to the emanation.¹⁶⁷ Avicenna notes that God, knowing God's own perfection and goodness, knows and loves Godself. Because knowing its own essence entails knowing the necessary concomitants¹⁶⁸ of its essence, God also loves the necessary concomitants of God's essence by extension. God's object of knowledge and love is Godself, but God is aware of and approves of those things which follow from God's essence.¹⁶⁹ Accordingly, God consents to and approves of God's emanation.

If God has knowledge of God's emanation and consents to God's emanation, then, by Avicenna's definition of 'voluntary,' God emanates voluntarily. However, this voluntary emanation is not an intentional emanation. Intending, Avicenna states, is the manner in which human beings will something. Human agents have an object of their willing, form the intention, and aim to gain some benefit from their act. In contrast, intending does *not* describe how God wills.¹⁷⁰ God does not form intentions. Given the essence of God, God

¹⁶⁴ 'Concomitant' is used here in Avicenna's technical sense. See 3b below for a discussion of what Avicenna means by 'concomitant.'

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of whether the universe being a necessary concomitant of God's means that God creates necessarily, see the following section.

¹⁶⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 5-9.

¹⁶⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 12-15.

¹⁶⁸ Again, this is a technical term that is explained below.

¹⁶⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 32-35.

¹⁷⁰ This is the mistake Zedler makes: she conflates *human* willing, which Avicenna describes in terms of 'intending,' with *divine* willing, which does not involve intending. Though Avicenna denies that God 'intends' (as humans must), Avicenna does not deny that God wills.

cannot have an object of its will that is distinct from God. Were God to intend, God would have to (1) intend something distinct from Godself and (2) intend some benefit to occur because of God's action. God would then have to will multiple objects—God would will God's own existence, God would will the existence of the universe, and God would will some benefit from the existence of the universe. Avicenna asserts that were God to will both Godself and some object distinct from Godself, then multiplicity would be introduced into God.¹⁷¹ As Rahim Acar notes, "Since God primarily knows, wills, and loves himself, God's will cannot be directed to an end other than God" and have God's unity be preserved.¹⁷²

Not only would God intending introduce multiplicity by requiring multiple objects of God's will, but God intending would also introduce multiplicity by requiring multiple actions of the will. God, according to the definition of intention, would have to form an intention. This intention formation is in addition to willing its own existence. Avicenna asserts that it is impossible for God to will multiple things because God is entirely simple, meaning that God has *one* act of will.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 20-29.

¹⁷² Acar, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," 69.

¹⁷³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326 20-29. Avicenna maintains that to have multiple acts of will introduces multiplicity into God. What he does not explicitly address is why it cannot be the case that God has one act of will in which God wills two things in conjunction, such as God willing its own existence *and* the existence of the universe (rather than willing its own existence and willing the existence of the universe). It seems that Avicenna must argue that were God to have one act of will with multiple objects, the multiplicity of the objects of its will would introduce multiplicity into God. However, if Avicenna were to respond thus, his explanation regarding how God can have one act of knowledge—God's self-apprehension—that includes an apprehension of all of the necessary concomitants of God would *also* seem to introduce multiplicity into God. God would have multiple objects of knowledge—itsself *and* its concomitants. Marmura addresses the issue of whether God's knowledge involves a multiplicity in his article "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars." There, Marmura interprets Avicenna to be saying that self-knowledge does not imply a multiplicity because the self is the only true object of knowledge. Additionally, Marmura notes that Avicenna asserts that God has knowledge of the cause of the universe (i.e. itself), and knowledge of the cause entails knowledge of the effect. Thus, God is the only object of its knowledge, but in knowing itself, God gains knowledge of distinct beings (See Marmura, Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars," 301-2). So, *mutatis mutandis*, Avicenna might argue that God has one object of its will—itsself—but willing itself entails willing the effects of its existence. Thus, God has only one object of its will.

Emanation, then, is the result of the divine will.¹⁷⁴ God acts by volition when God emanates, but this volitional act is not an action by intention. God does not act by nature when God emanates. Strictly speaking, God emanates because God wills to emanate. Thus far, Avicenna's account of creation by emanation aligns with the Islamic conception of creation as voluntary insofar as it is willed by God. What must be explored further is whether this voluntary emanation is a *free* voluntary emanation.

3. Volitional, but Necessary?

So far, it is clear that Avicenna asserts that God emanates as the result of volition and not the result of nature or intention. While scholars who assert that emanation is necessary according to Avicenna focus primarily on arguing that God emanates by nature for Avicenna, it is worthwhile to explore whether God's voluntary emanation is a *free* emanation. Freedom in its broadest sense implies a lack of either internal or external constraint. If God emanates voluntarily and freely, then nothing in God's nature or outside of God would necessitate God's emanating. If God emanates voluntarily and necessarily, then something in God's nature or outside of God necessitates God's emanating. In order to explore whether God emanates freely or necessarily, this section will address possible external compulsions and possible internal compulsions, including whether God being a necessarily existing being entails that God emanates necessarily.

¹⁷⁴ This, of course, is contrary to Zedler's claims. She commits two major errors in her explication of Avicenna's cosmogony. Primarily, she conflates Avicenna's disavowal of God creating intentionally with a disavowal of God creating voluntarily. Secondly, she follows Aquinas's reading of Avicenna, which means that she insists that Avicenna views God's creation as the result of the necessity of God's nature. As my analysis has shown, neither Zedler nor Aquinas are accurately representing Avicenna's thought. See Zedler, 105-159.

a. External Compulsions

From the discussion above, it is clear that Avicenna does not believe that God's action is necessitated by anything external to God. God wills and knows Godself.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, God is not beholden to things external to Godself. God does not act for any reason other than Godself. If there is anything that necessitates God's emanation, it would have to be something internal to God.

b. Internal Compulsions

Whether God's emanation is necessitated by something internal to God is still unclear. Given what Avicenna says about the universe being a necessary concomitant of God's essence and the fact that God's will is identical to God's knowledge and essence, it seems that God must create.¹⁷⁶ God's essence seems like it determines God's actions. Because God's essence has necessary concomitants, God must bring about those concomitants. If this is true, then God has some internal compulsion to create.

Avicenna discusses concomitants in his *Annotations*.¹⁷⁷ There, he says that a concomitant "is a thing that necessarily follows something because of what it is that [the thing] is."¹⁷⁸ So, if x is a concomitant of y , then x necessarily follows y . However, it is not the case that y subsists through x .¹⁷⁹ By denying the subsistence of y through x , Avicenna seems to assert that the existence of y does not depend on x , and y does not depend on x to be what y is. Despite x being its concomitant, y is still independent of x . Acar offers an analogy

¹⁷⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7 p. 292 1-13.

¹⁷⁶ Acar articulates this sentiment only to argue against it. See Acar, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," 70.

¹⁷⁷ The work is titled *Ta'liqāt*, which means 'collection,' and this work appears to be a collection of Avicenna's lectures.

¹⁷⁸ Avicenna, *Ta'liqāt*, ed. Abdurrahman Badawi (Iran: Miktab al-Ilam al-Islami, 1983), 180; trans. and quoted in Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas's Positions*, Vol. 58, *Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science: Texts and Studies*, eds. H. Daiber and D. Pingree, 144 (Boston: Brill, 2005).

¹⁷⁹ Avicenna, *Ta'liqāt*, p. 103; translated and quoted in Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144.

to friendship. Friendship, which can be understood as love between (at least) two people, cannot be gained simply by two people helping each other. If Marisol and Fatima help each other but do not love each other, they have a business relationship rather than a friendship. But friends help those they love; helping each other follows necessarily from friendship. In this case, benefit—specifically, being helped by a friend—is a concomitant of friendship but is not constitutive of friendship.¹⁸⁰ Thus, although x is a necessary concomitant of y , x follows from y but is not constitutive of y .

In his *Annotations*, Avicenna distinguishes two types of concomitants. The first type is a concomitant of some other thing because the concomitant stems from the nature and substance of that other thing. Examples of this type of concomitant include light as a concomitant of the sun and burning as a concomitant of heat.¹⁸¹ If the cosmos is this type of concomitant of God, then God would have some internal compulsion to create. God, being what God is, must bring about the existence of the universe.

However, a concomitant stemming from the nature of a thing is not the only type of concomitant. The second type of concomitant stems from the self-knowledge of some other thing. It is this concomitance that follows from God. God is “perfect, complete, loved, and [God] knows [Godself],” and the things which exist because of God are concomitants of God’s self-knowledge.¹⁸² Unlike light and heat, which have no will or knowledge, God has knowledge, and God’s concomitants exist because of God’s knowledge.¹⁸³

Of course, one might object that the identity of divine attributes means that the divine knowledge is identical to the divine will and essence. Thus, the concomitant of God

¹⁸⁰ Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144.

¹⁸¹ Avicenna, *Ta’līqāt* p. 103; translated and quoted in Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144.

¹⁸² Avicenna, *Ta’līqāt* p. 103; translated and quoted in Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144.

¹⁸³ Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 145.

because of God's essence as much as God's knowledge. The concomitants of God follow from what God is. So, both types of concomitants follow from the nature of the thing of which they are concomitants; however, in the case of God, the divine knowledge is essential to what God is.¹⁸⁴

Perhaps one could respond on Avicenna's behalf to this objection in the following manner. An action stemming from a being's nature depends only on that being's nature, not on its intellect or will. An action that involves an agent's will (and, accordingly, its intellect) is a voluntary action. The involvement of the will, even though it is identical to God's essence, means that God's action is voluntary rather than natural. What it takes for an action to be voluntary is for God to have knowledge of the action and to consent to the action, which means that God's faculty of will is involved in any voluntary action. The identity of God's will, knowledge, and essence does not negate that God's will is involved in God performing the action in question.

While there are potential explanatory difficulties which arise from Avicenna's distinction between these two types of concomitants, Avicenna straightforwardly denies that concomitance follows from God's nature.¹⁸⁵ Instead, concomitance follows from God's knowledge. Accordingly, the universe is a concomitant of God, but God is not compelled to create it. The universe exists because of God's knowledge rather than because of some feature of God compelling God to create.

From Avicenna's discussion of intention (and subsequent denial that God intends to emanate), one can garner further support for the notion that God has no internal

¹⁸⁴ Avicenna, *Ta'liqāt* p. 103; translated and quoted in Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 145. Avicenna neither addresses nor even considers this sort of objection.

¹⁸⁵ Avicenna, *Ta'liqāt* p. 103; translated and quoted in Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 144.

compulsion to create. God cannot intend to emanate; otherwise, God would be required to have something other than Godself as an object of God's will. While this fact supports the earlier claim that God suffers no external compulsion to create, it also supports the claim that nothing within God compels it to create. Were God to hold something else as an object of God's will, some imperfection would be implied in God.¹⁸⁶ God wills what is supremely good, so if God wills something other than Godself, then God is not supremely good. Hence, God holds only Godself as the object of God's will and is not compelled to create by some internal feature of Godself. So, it seems that for some agent, x , to be compelled by some object of its will, y , y has to be distinct from x . Since God wills God's existence, the object of God's will is not distinct from God. Thus, God's will is not compelled.

Further, in describing the notion of generosity, Avicenna specifies that generosity is giving what is proper without pursuing one's desires or expecting remuneration.¹⁸⁷ Since Avicenna describes creation elsewhere as an act of God's generosity, it is important to note that if God were to pursue some desire or to expect repayment for some action, God would be imperfect.¹⁸⁸ Any agent who can gain something in return for its actions is imperfect either with regard to its being or one of its perfections.¹⁸⁹ Avicenna explains that God is perfect—above perfection, Avicenna says when speaking most carefully—and thus God's emanation must be an act of generosity.¹⁹⁰ Because God is perfect, God gains nothing from the act of creating. And, since God gains nothing from the act of creating, Avicenna concludes that there is nothing in God that compels God to create.

¹⁸⁶ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 326.15-35; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 145.

¹⁸⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.5 p. 231 36-40- p. 232 1; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 142.

¹⁸⁸ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.5 p. 232 27-28; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 142.

¹⁸⁹; Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation*, 142.

¹⁹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6 p. 283 9; Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.5 p.232 29-36.

In light of the above, Avicenna denies that there is any external or internal compulsion which requires God to emanate. God wills only Godself, so nothing external to God could compel God to create. God, according to Avicenna, is not compelled by anything internal to God, either. The universe is a necessary concomitant of God, but the universe is a necessary concomitant of God's knowledge (and, by extension, will). Avicenna vigorously affirms God's perfection, which entails that God could gain nothing from creating. There is no internal feature of God that is improved by creating, and, by implication, there is nothing about God that would be diminished by refraining from creating. If God is not compelled to create—and Avicenna seems to think that God is not compelled—then God, if God emanates, emanates freely. Not only does God emanate voluntarily—that is, because God wills to emanate—but God also emanates freely. Avicenna's account of creation as emanation, then, fits with the Islamic conception of creation as voluntary. However, Avicenna's account of creation as emanation reveals that Avicenna conceives of emanation in creation as occurring voluntarily.¹⁹¹

c. A Necessary Being: necessary in all respects

Avicenna's defense of a voluntary and free creation is not yet complete. He understands God's emanation to be the result a divine volition free of either internal or external compulsion. However, Avicenna insists that the universe exists necessarily; that is, given the fact that God exists, the universe cannot fail to exist.¹⁹² Avicenna's claim that the

¹⁹¹ A related question is whether any emanation occurs naturally. It seems that, given Avicenna's definition of a voluntary action being an action of which the agent has knowledge and to which the agent consents, the emanations of the Intellects are likely voluntary emanations because they arise from each Intellect's self-reflection and reflection upon God. If the Intellects must reflect in order to emanate, then the emanation originates from an intellectual act. However, the textual evidence is not conclusive. Avicenna simply does not address whether the emanations by the Intellects are necessary or voluntary. It seems possible that other emanations *could* be necessary—such as light emanating from the sun—but any such examples of necessary emanation are not clearly and obviously located within the scope of creating by emanating.

¹⁹² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.1 p. 300 6-11.

universe is necessary must be reconciled with his claim that God creates freely. If the universe must exist, then God cannot fail to bring about its existence. So, God creates freely—that is, without internal or external constraints—and necessarily. How Avicenna understands the meaning of God creating necessarily must be explained, as does the relationship between necessary and free creation.

The discussions above have focused on how the attributes of God relate to God emanating, but God's ontological status is also important for explaining why God emanates.¹⁹³ Because of what God is—a simple, eternal, changeless being—God can emanate one simple being in one act of knowledge and will. Because of how God is—an ontologically necessary being—God is necessary in all of God's respects.¹⁹⁴ God is a being devoid of potentiality; God is fully actualized, complete, and perfect. Thus, God can neither change nor be different than what God is. God is devoid of possibility—there are not *options* for what God could be like or for what God could do. Instead, God is what God is and cannot be otherwise.

Accordingly, God freely wills to create, but God does not freely *decide* to create.¹⁹⁵ God's will cannot be otherwise: it, too, is necessary. God, then, cannot do otherwise than what God does. Because God cannot be or do otherwise, there are not multiple actions God could potentially perform. God can will only one thing—Godself—and it is not possible for

¹⁹³ As Acar notes, Avicenna does not directly address the differences between God's attributes and ontological status with regards to God's emanation. However, Avicenna's insistence that God emanates voluntarily is otherwise difficult to square, so to speak, with his insistence that the universe is a necessary concomitant of God. See Acar, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," 73.

¹⁹⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.1 p. 300 6-11; Acar, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," 74. Marmura asserts that the logical order is identical to the ontological order for Avicenna. So, if Avicenna judges it to be logically necessary that *x* exists, Avicenna will also judge *x* to be a necessary being. See Marmura, "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82.3 (1962), 302.

¹⁹⁵ Acar, "Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action," 75.

God's will, knowledge, or essence to be different than what it is. God brings about the existence of the universe voluntarily and freely, but God could not have done otherwise.

Avicenna concludes that because God is a necessary being, God cannot fail to bring about the existence of the universe. Given the facts that God exists, God is a necessary being, and the universe exists, Avicenna can conclude that the universe must exist as long as God exists. Precisely *why* the divine knowledge and will entail God's emanation is not explained. There is no explanation outside God why God wills to emanate. And, one can know that God wills to emanate because the universe exists. And one can know that God wills to emanate because the universe exists.

Emanation, then, is the result of a free act of will by God. While emanation can theoretically occur either because of the nature of the emanator or because of the will of the emanator, God emanates by will. God suffers no internal or external compulsion to emanate, but God cannot opt to act differently because God is necessary in all respects. Avicenna presents Neoplatonic emanation as a theory which encompasses both natural and voluntary emanation. It is not emanation, *per se*, which is necessary; instead, it is God who is necessary, and thus all of God's attributes and acts are necessary. Emanation is the act performed by God, but God's emanation is voluntary (insofar as God emanates freely as a result of God's will) and necessary (insofar as God is a fully necessary being).

III. Emanation as a Type of Efficient Causation

The discussion of God's emanation of the cosmos does not exhaust the ways in which Avicenna discusses God's causation of the cosmos. In addition to explaining that God causes the existence of other beings by emanating, Avicenna asserts that God is the efficient cause of the cosmos. What is explored here is how Avicenna relates these two ways of

talking about causation—causation by emanation and by efficient causation—to each other within the context of creation. To understand how emanation and efficient causation are related as types of causation, Avicenna’s conception of efficient causation must be explored. In this section, the claim that Avicenna says God is the efficient cause of the cosmos is defended first. Next, Avicenna’s conception of efficient causation is explained, with particular attention paid to divine efficient causation. Once God’s efficient causation has been explored, the relationship Avicenna envisions between these two causal theories with different historical origins can be explained.

A. Types of Efficient Causation

Though Avicenna speaks of God’s causation exclusively in terms of emanation in his extended creation account in *Metaphysics of the Healing* book nine, elsewhere Avicenna refers to God as the efficient cause of the universe. Avicenna uses the specific language of efficient causation when describing God’s causation. In a discussion of the divine attributes, Avicenna says,

“If we say [it is] a first efficient principle, or a first absolute principle, then it must necessarily be one. If, however, we say [it is] a first material principle and a first formal principle and others of this sort, [it] would not have the same necessity of being as the necessity of this in God. For none of [these causes] is a first absolute cause because God is one and has the status of that [efficient] principle.”¹⁹⁶

God is the “first efficient principle” of what exists, and as the “first efficient principle,” God must be an entirely simple being. Avicenna here links the concept of God as the principle of all other things to the concept of efficient causation.

¹⁹⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.3 p. 271 26-35; *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* V-X VIII.3 p. 395: “cum dicitur principium primum agens, vel primum principium absolute, necesse est esse unum. Cum autem dicitur causa prima materialis et causa prima formalis et cetera huiusmodi, non est necesse esse unam quemadmodum hoc debet in necesse esse. Nulla enim earum est causa prima absolute, sed necesse esse est principium etiam illarum primarum.”

In Avicenna's explication of efficient causation, Avicenna again refers to God as an efficient cause. Using the term "agent cause," Avicenna says that some agent causes are "the principle and giver of existence of it, just as the Creator to the world."¹⁹⁷ Not only does Avicenna again explicitly link being a principle of existence to being a giver of existence, but he also uses God as an example of this type of efficient causation. Given the fact that Avicenna does use the language of efficient causation to describe God's creative act, a further explanation of what Avicenna takes efficient causation to be is warranted.

1. Whether God creates by Natural Efficient Causation

In *Physics of the Healing* book two, Avicenna discusses the four kinds of causes. Regarding efficient causation, which Avicenna frequently calls agent causation, Avicenna says that "in natural things, *agent* is often said of the principle of motion in another thing insofar as it is other."¹⁹⁸ Here, he is appealing to Aristotle's definition of efficient causation in *Metaphysics* book five.¹⁹⁹ Avicenna clarifies that by motion, he means that which moves from potency to act in matter.²⁰⁰ So, an efficient cause is a cause that moves some matter from potency to act. Avicenna gives the example of a physician curing himself. The physician moves something in himself from potency to act: insofar as he is the physician affecting the cure, he is the efficient cause; yet, insofar as he is the one whose matter is being brought from potency to act, he is the patient—that is, the thing undergoing the change.

Following Aristotle's explication, Avicenna's description of natural efficient causation involves an agent who affects the change and a patient which undergoes the

¹⁹⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1. p. 195, 1-4; *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* V-X A257 21-2 p. 292: principium essendi et datorem eius, sicut creator mundi?

¹⁹⁸ Avicenna, *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p.64; *Liber Primus Naturalium* X A 49 16-17 p.86: "et *efficiens* in rebus naturalis aliquando dicitur principium motus in alio a se secundum hoc quod est aliud".

¹⁹⁹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 5.12.1019a15ff.

²⁰⁰ Avicenna, *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p.64.

change by moving from potency into act in some way. This patient is composed of matter that subsists through the change of some of its potency into act. Avicenna also follows Aristotle's description of the types of change a material patient can undergo. It can undergo a change in its accidental features, that is, a change in its quality, quantity, place, or position. So, the physician undergoes an accidental change when he heals himself. Alternately, a patient could undergo a substantial change; the material composing the patient could be, as Avicenna says, "prepared" to receive a new form.²⁰¹ In an instance of substantial change, what was substance A goes out of existence and substance B comes to exist (and shares the matter of A) by the work of the efficient cause. An example of a patient undergoing a substantial change is the generation of new life: semen is deposited, and the semen joins with the menstrual products to become a new entity.²⁰² There is some matter, which Avicenna later specifies to be Prime Matter, that underlies substance A and underlies substance B.²⁰³ From the examples used, it becomes evident that Avicenna, like Aristotle, distinguishes between efficient causation which arises from a thing's nature and efficient causation which arises from a thing's volition. Semen, given the right circumstances, naturally works to produce a new life. Physicians, however, must will to cure either themselves or others.

Clearly, if every efficient cause is what Avicenna terms a 'natural efficient cause' or 'natural agent,' then God is *not* the efficient cause of the universe. In his creation account, Avicenna asserts that God emanates the First Intellect. The First Intellect, as emanated from God, is not composed of matter. Instead, matter arises when the First Intellect considers its own ontological status. The act of creation, then, cannot be an accidental change because

²⁰¹ Avicenna, *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p. 65.

²⁰² Avicenna gives the example of "moving semen during the preparatory states" for procreation in the text. *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p. 65.

²⁰³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* II.2 p.48-57.

there is no patient that underlies God's emanation of the First Intellect. Instead, something new comes into existence. Neither can creation be a substantial change, for there is no prime matter underlying God's emanation of the First Intellect.

Natural agents, however, are not the only agents of efficient causation that Avicenna recognizes. In his *Physics of the Healing*, Avicenna mentions a distinction between the subject matter of natural philosophy, which includes discussing types of causes in order to ascertain their effects, and the subject matter of metaphysics, which includes proving that everything composite has a cause and discussing both how many causes there are and what those causes are like.²⁰⁴ In order to understand why Avicenna thinks there are efficient causes which are not natural causes, a short excursus into an explanation of how Avicenna's theory of what has been termed metaphysical efficient causation is not an ad-hoc addendum to his understanding of causation but an integral part of how he views metaphysics, ontology, and natural efficient causation generally is necessary.

2. Excursus: Apology for metaphysical efficient causation

Avicenna defends the existence of natural efficient causes and metaphysical efficient causes in his *Metaphysics of the Healing*. While it might appear that Avicenna introduces this metaphysical efficient causation into Aristotle's theory—thus adulterating it—Avicenna would not have agreed with that assessment. The notion of metaphysical efficient causation is adumbrated in three aspects of Avicenna's larger philosophical project. First, in his conception of metaphysics as the study of being and separables, Avicenna suggests that some efficient causation is not natural efficient causation. Second, in his modal ontology, Avicenna implies that something must be able to efficiently cause existence. Third, in his

²⁰⁴ Avicenna, *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p. 65.

discussion of natural efficient causation, Avicenna highlights several problems with natural agent causation that could be avoided if one posited metaphysical agent causation.

a. Metaphysics is the study of being and separables

In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses what the subject matter is for those who study metaphysics. In book four, Aristotle says that metaphysics studies being as such; but he notes that, because everything that exists is either substance or is related to substance, substance is what is studied in the science of metaphysics.²⁰⁵ Later, in book six, Aristotle says that metaphysics is the science of the separable.²⁰⁶ With this Aristotelian background in place, it is now necessary to examine Avicenna's division of the sciences.

In the first book of *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Avicenna proposes a division of the sciences between practical and theoretical knowledge. He further divides theoretical knowledge into natural, mathematical, and divine knowledge, also called metaphysical knowledge.²⁰⁷ Natural science *and* mathematical science involves a study of things that can be subject to motion, which includes things which are essentially subject to motion—material beings, for example—and things which are merely subject to motion but could at least conceivably exist apart from motion—unity or causality, for example. Avicenna gives unity and causality as examples of things which can exist apart from motion because each can be conceived of apart from motion. It is possible to consider a unified immaterial being, and it is possible to consider *what* causation is (rather than considering specific acts of causation). Metaphysical science, however, studies both things which are merely subject to motion and

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.2 1003b 5-10; Richardson, 15-16.

²⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI.1 1025a 3-1026b 32. Richardson, 17.

²⁰⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.1 p. 2 1-18.

things which are necessarily not subject to motion—things like God.²⁰⁸ Avicenna closely correlates things which are subject to motion to material things, which means that natural science and mathematics involve the study of material objects. Things that are studied insofar as they are subject to motion/matter are studied in either natural science or mathematics. Things that are studied insofar as they are not subject to motion/matter are studied in metaphysics.²⁰⁹ Things which can be studied insofar as they are not subject to motion involve causation, existence, and God.

There are, then, subjects which can be studied only by some sort of metaphysical investigation. These subjects include substance, which can be conceptualized apart from sensible things, and unity *per se*. Causation, too, can be considered apart from sensible things. One can consider what it means for *x* to be a cause, for example. According to Avicenna, these apparently disparate subjects fall under a single topic of study: the study of the existent as such.²¹⁰ So, metaphysics is the study of things which are separable from motion/matter. The study of each of these separables involves a study of the existent as such, which, for Avicenna, means that the existent as such is the general subject of metaphysics.

Given the subject matter of the science of metaphysics, it is now clear that the discussion of natural agents above suggests that nothing except natural agents are efficient causes. Natural agents engender motion in material objects, but such an explanation of causation cannot apply to necessary beings or immaterial, separated subjects. Aristotle's discussion of causation concerns physical causation, but Avicenna takes immaterial objects and necessary beings to be subjects in discussions of causation as well. Accordingly,

²⁰⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.1 p. 2 19-33; Richardson, 16; Michael Marmura, "Avicenna on the Division of the Sciences in the Isagoge of his Shifa," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* 4.2 (1980), 242-3.

²⁰⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.1 p. 2 19-33; Richardson, 16; Michael Marmura, "Avicenna on the Division of the Sciences in the Isagoge of his Shifa," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* 4.2 (1980), 242-3.

²¹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.2 p. 9 31-34; Richardson, 21.

Avicenna delineates an additional category of efficient causation that applies to those beings which Aristotle has excluded from his metaphysical explanation.

b. Modal Ontology

The need for this additional sort of causation is implied by Avicenna's modal ontology. Avicenna distinguishes between two ways to consider beings in themselves. Beings are either necessary beings—beings that cannot fail to exist, whether by their own power or the powers of another—or possible beings—beings which are dependent on another for their existence.²¹¹ In the universe, there are a plethora of possible beings, evidenced by the fact that beings like Dodo birds once existed but now do not. So, *at least some* of the beings in the universe are possible beings considered in themselves. According to Avicenna, the only explanation for the existence of a universe teeming with possible beings is that some necessary being exists.²¹² Whatever comes into existence is a possible being; a necessary being *must* exist.²¹³ In order for a possible being to come into existence, something must bring it into existence.²¹⁴ This now-existing possible being must be brought about in such a way that renders its own existence necessary through its creator. Avicenna argues that if a possible being is possible in itself and possible through another, then an infinite regress of possible beings causes this causal chain. However, Avicenna argues that this must not be the case for two reasons: first, an infinity of causes is impossible; and second, possible beings, whether possible in themselves or possible through another, can either exist or not exist,

²¹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 30 1-7. Beings could also be impossible—that is, they cannot exist. As Richardson notes, Avicenna's distinction between possible and necessary beings “is exhaustive, since what is impossible simply doesn't exist” (34).

²¹² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* II.2 p. 48 1-2.

²¹³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 30 7-36-p31 1-9.

²¹⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 31 10-26.

which means that in this infinite chain of causes, *every* possible being would have to exist.²¹⁵ This is statistically improbable. Accordingly, Avicenna asserts that a now-existing possible being must be possible through itself and necessary through another. Since beings are either necessary or possible and since possible beings cannot produce something necessary through another, the sort of beings which can produce something necessary through another are necessary beings.²¹⁶ So, in order for the contingent beings with which we are familiar to exist, some necessary being must be causing those beings (or at least be a part of the causal chain which yields such beings). Avicenna's additional type of efficient cause, then, is warranted by his understanding of necessary and possible beings.

c. Shortcomings of Natural Efficient Causation

Further, in Avicenna's discussion of natural efficient causes, he highlights some problematic features of natural agent causation. In "The Metaphysics of Agency," Richardson argues that three features of Aristotelian causation are what warrant Avicenna's expansion of Aristotelian causal agency. First, the way discussions of natural efficient causation are framed lead one to think that bringing about the existence of x involves some change from potency to act in x itself. When philosophers discuss creation and say creation means bringing about the existence of x after x 's non-existence, this way of talking wrongly suggests that x , before x 's creation, has some potency.²¹⁷ However, since x does not exist, x does not have any potency. To bring about the existence of x is to make x come to exist. No potency of x becomes act, for no potency of x existed before x was created. In order to explain how x is caused, then, a different conception of efficient causation—specifically, an efficient causation that does not posit a change from potency to act—is needed.

²¹⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 31 10-39-p. 32 1-6.

²¹⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 31 7-38-p. 33 1-20.

²¹⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 196-200. Richardson, 23-32.

Second, the way discussions of natural efficient causation are framed lead one to think that once y brings about the existence of x , x will continue to exist without y 's continued influence.²¹⁸ Here, Avicenna's argument relies on the distinction he made earlier between beings which are either necessary or possible. A being could be necessary either in itself or through another. A being could be possible in itself; Avicenna has already rejected the notion that a being could exist and be possible through another.²¹⁹ After y brings about the existence of x , x 's existence is either necessary in itself or possible in itself. If x 's existence is possible in itself, then x could either exist or not exist. Accordingly, what x is—a being that is possible in itself—cannot account for x 's continued existence after y brings it about. The being x , on its own, could either exist or fail to exist; nothing in x is able to keep itself in existence. Therefore, if x is possible in itself, then x cannot account for its continued existence.²²⁰

Now we consider whether y could bring about x and x be a necessary being. If x is necessary in itself, then x must be the sort of thing that cannot fail to exist. Alas! A being that is necessary in itself *is not the sort of being that can be brought about by another being*. A necessary being necessary in itself *always* exists and thus is uncaused. So, x cannot be necessary in itself.²²¹

Since x cannot be possible in itself or necessary in itself, then x is necessary through another. Avicenna delineates three options for what this “another” could potentially be. This “another” is either (1) the act of origination by which x is brought about; or (2) some

²¹⁸ See Richardson, 32-46 for an extended discussion.

²¹⁹ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 passim. A being that is possible through another would be caused by an infinite regress of similar causal arrangements, where x is possible through y is possible through z , *ad infinitum*. Avicenna rejects the possibility of an actual infinite, and thus he denies that a being could be possible through another.

²²⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p.196 8-37-p.198 24; Richardson 34-46; McGinnis 194-195.

²²¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 198 25-40; McGinnis 195.

attribute of x itself; or (3) something different. According to Avicenna, (1) cannot be the thing through which x is necessary, for the act of origination by which x is brought about is completed as soon as x exists. The act of origination, he says, ceases to exist upon its completion. If (2), then x continues to exist because of some attribute of itself, perhaps the attribute of having undergone origination. But, according to Avicenna's ontology, this attribute of x is either a necessary feature of x in itself or of x through another. If this attribute of x is a necessary feature of x in itself, then x cannot have come to be because x would be necessary in itself. If this attribute of x is a necessary feature of x through another, then x gains that feature through another and is necessary through another. So, (2) collapses into x being necessary through itself. Option (3) is the only one remaining. The being x is necessitated by another, namely by y . According to Avicenna, the fact that x comes to exist because y produces it does not mean that what y does is bring x into existence (and nothing more). Instead, the fact that x did not exist but now does exist throws into sharp relief the picture of y as what makes x exist and continues to make x exist. For Avicenna, saying that y is the cause of x means that y gives existence to x , both in that y brings x into existence and that y keeps x in existence.²²² There must, then, be some type of efficient causation that applies to this act, but natural efficient causation does not.

Third, the way discussions of natural efficient causation are framed lead one to think that natural agents are "sufficient to bring about the existence of their purported effects".²²³ Avicenna says that "common people" speak of y causing x at a time when y is not causing x .²²⁴ For example, people are prone to call Bob, "builder," even when Bob is lazily reclining on his couch watching soccer. Bob deserves the appellation, "builder," only when he is

²²² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 198 25-40-p. 200 35.

²²³ Richardson, 46.

²²⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 200 6-35.

currently building something.²²⁵ Worse yet, people are disposed to say that Bob is the cause of a building long after Bob has finished his work. People misattribute the building's existence to Bob. Instead, Avicenna says, the continued *existence* of the building (or the child or the car, etc.) is caused by the thing which actually brought about the existence of the building.²²⁶ Bob's actions alone are not sufficient. According to Richardson, Avicenna does not think that natural agents bring about the existence of their effects; instead, the Giver of Forms plays a role in bringing about the existence of new beings by bestowing x 's form on x at the moment of its creation.²²⁷ Bob, then, needs to be assisted in his work by the Giver of Forms to bring something new into existence. There has to be some type of causation that applies to scenarios where the cause is sufficient to bring about its effect, for natural efficient causation does not apply to such cases.

This metaphysical efficient causation which Avicenna proposes is an integral part of his larger philosophical project. Based on the subject matter of metaphysics, his modal ontology, and his criticisms of the shortcomings of natural efficient causation, it seems that Avicenna has good reason to think that there is such a type of causation as metaphysical efficient causation. From the fact that Avicenna embraces the rest of Aristotle's distinctions of types of causation and from the way in which Avicenna presents this additional metaphysical cause, it is safe to conclude that Avicenna intends to develop the implications of Aristotle's account of causation. Although he never explicitly states this, he would not see himself as fundamentally departing from Aristotle's theories of causation. Instead, Avicenna

²²⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 200 6-35; Richardson, 46-47.

²²⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 200 6-35; Richardson, 47.

²²⁷ Richardson, 47-58. I will not enter here into Richardson's (and others') debates about the role of the Giver of Forms in substantial change. Instead, I confine myself to acknowledging that Avicenna asserts that the Giver of Forms plays some role in substantial change, and this fact reveals that Avicenna's conception of Aristotelian causation implicitly includes some metaphysical efficient cause. In this case, the Giver of Forms would be the metaphysical efficient cause. See *Physics of the Healing* I.10 p. 65 for Avicenna's (brief but clear) comments on the role of the Giver of Forms in substantial change.

is making explicit what is implied by the shortcomings of Aristotle's account of efficient causation—there must be an additional type of efficient cause. Avicenna would most likely have perceived himself to be remedying an unfortunate oversight made by his predecessor, an oversight that can be remedied without deviating from the spirit, so to speak, of the initial theory.²²⁸ To a description of this metaphysical efficient causation we now turn.

B. Necessary Existent creates by Metaphysical Efficient Causation

With this apology for metaphysical efficient causation in place, we can begin an examination of this type of causation. In contrast to natural efficient causation, this additional type of efficient causation is applied not to an agent responsible for bringing about some motion or change in a material patient but instead is applied to an agent responsible for bringing about the existence of something.²²⁹ Whereas natural efficient causes act upon a pre-existing material patient, this 'metaphysical' efficient cause does not act upon anything pre-existing. The metaphysical efficient cause brings about the existence of something that did not previously exist. So, there is no patient which underlies the metaphysical efficient cause's action, material or otherwise. The metaphysical efficient cause does not actualize any potency in an object, for before the metaphysical efficient cause brings about the existence of this object, there would be no potency there to actualize. The

²²⁸ Marmura makes similar comments regarding Avicenna's treatment of Aristotelian philosophy. At least in his discussions of causation, Avicenna clearly intends to work within the Aristotelian tradition. See Michael Marmura, "The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael Marmura (New York: SUNY, 1984), 172.

²²⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 195 3-4.

metaphysical efficient cause is still an *efficient* cause because it is the agent responsible for bringing about the existence of a new agent.²³⁰

God is the paradigm example Avicenna gives of this metaphysical efficient cause. The metaphysical efficient cause is the “principle and giver of existence, as in the case of God with respect to the world.”²³¹ God brings about the existence of the universe via its emanation of the First Intellect. Metaphysicians, Avicenna says, properly apply the term “agent”—that is, efficient cause—to God in this instance. Avicenna maintains a strong distinction between God and the universe: God is the metaphysical efficient cause, and the universe is the effect. God does not *become* the universe, nor does God become conjoined to the universe.²³²

Since God is the metaphysical efficient cause of the universe, God’s causation of the universe has the features that suggested scenarios in which natural efficient causation did not apply. Because a metaphysical efficient cause does not act upon some pre-existing patient, it is clear that the non-existence of the effect is not a causal factor in its eventual existence. As noted above, Avicenna asserts that saying that a metaphysical efficient cause brings about

²³⁰ This is what Thomas Gaskill overlooks in his “Ibn Sina’s Ontology in his *Danishnama ‘ala’i*.” Gaskill says that the origination of the universe by God is not efficient causal but final causal. God’s act is “one of final cause to effect” (317). Further, Gaskill denies that God *could* be an efficient cause because efficient causation requires matter (342). There are two problems with Gaskill’s interpretation. First, Avicenna in the *Metaphysics of the Healing* offers an explanation of efficient causation without matter—this metaphysical efficient causation discussed above. While this distinction might not be reiterated in the *Danishnama ‘ala’i*, it is a well-known (nigh, famous) distinction made by Avicenna. Some explanation for why he ignores Avicenna’s expanded interpretation of Aristotelian efficient causation is certainly warranted. Second, even though God is the final cause of the universe, because God is the agent that brings about the existence of the universe, God is *also* the efficient cause of the universe. Gaskill is clear and consistent on this point: he denies that God is an efficient cause and insists that God is only a final cause of the universe. Given Aristotle’s (and Avicenna’s) descriptions of final causation, it is difficult to see how God can be the final cause but not also the efficient cause of the universe since it is the being which brings about (or, at least, initiates the chain of being that brings about) the existence of the universe. See Thomas Gaskill, “Ibn Sina’s Ontology in his *Danishnama ‘ala’i*” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1992), especially pages 315-360.

²³¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 195 3-4; in a footnote, Marmura emphasizes that this applies where the agent who gives existence is also the telos of the newly existing thing.

²³² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1; Acar, *Talking about God*, 175; Michael Marmura, “Avicenna’s Chapter, ‘On the relative,’ in the *Metaphysics of the Shifa’*,” in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George F. Hourani (Albany: SUNY, 1975), 83-87.

the existence of something that did not previously exist could mislead one into thinking either that a thing's nonexistence has a cause or that a thing's nonexistence is a causal factor in the thing's eventual existence. The metaphysical efficient cause, not the nonexistence of the effect, is what brings about the existence of the effect.²³³

Additionally, a metaphysical efficient cause co-exists with its effect.²³⁴ The metaphysical efficient cause is responsible for the existence of its effect not only as an instigator of that existence but also as a sustainer of that existence. As long as the effect exists, the cause exists. Avicenna notes that one might object that if the cause and effect must co-exist, it is hard (if not impossible) to distinguish the cause from the effect.²³⁵ However, the co-existence of the cause and the effect applies to the duration of their existence not to their ontological statuses.²³⁶

A metaphysical efficient cause necessitates its effects. The effect, as discussed above, is necessary through the cause when the effect is the existence of something. A metaphysical efficient cause necessitates its effects because the metaphysical efficient cause brings about the existence of its effect. As long as the other causal conditions have been met—namely, there being no impediment in the efficient cause bringing about its effect—the effect must be brought about by its cause. Barring any impediment, the existence of the metaphysical efficient cause is sufficient for the existence of its effect. The effect is necessary, but not in itself. It is necessary through its cause.²³⁷

²³³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1.

²³⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 197-200.

²³⁵ For an extended discussion, see Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IV.1. Marmura and Richardson also have extended discussions. See Richardson, 23-46 and Marmura, "The Metaphysics of Efficient Causation in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)," 184-6.

²³⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1; Acar, 181.

²³⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 200 6-35; Richardson, 46-47.

A metaphysical efficient cause, then, is an efficient cause that brings about the existence of an effect. It does not require any patient to underlie the change. The metaphysical efficient cause—not the nonexistence of the effect—is what causes the effect to exist. A metaphysical efficient cause co-exists with its effect, but the metaphysical efficient cause does not need to have the same ontological status as its effect. A metaphysical efficient cause necessitates its effect, so the effect cannot fail to exist as long as all of the other causal conditions have been met.

What is unclear is whether a metaphysical efficient cause brings about its effect as the result of its nature or as the result of its will. Avicenna clearly allows that natural efficient causes can bring about their effects as the result of either their nature or a result of their will. If the metaphysical efficient cause were to bring about its effect as the result of its nature, then the cause would bring about its effect given the right circumstances. If the metaphysical efficient cause were to bring about the effect as the result of its will, then the cause would bring about its effect given that it wills the effect and there is no impediment to it bringing about the effect. Whether Avicenna's metaphysical efficient cause can be either as the result of nature or as the result of will (or both) cannot be determined at this point. However, if Avicenna's account of Neoplatonic emanation links to his account of metaphysical efficient causation, it seems that some metaphysical efficient causes must be voluntary given that God emanates voluntarily.

C. Creative Emanation as Efficient Causation

Thus far, I have defended the claim that Avicenna presents an account of creation via Neoplatonic emanation. Avicenna understands Neoplatonic emanation to be able to occur either via one's nature or via one's will. Avicenna *also* discusses God as an efficient

cause of the universe, albeit an efficient cause that brings about the existence of something. What remains to be examined is how Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation are related as theories of causation in creation. There are three possibilities. First, Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation could be completely distinct types of causation. Second, they could be identical causal theories. Third, they could be similar but distinct causal theories. Avicenna does not clearly state a relationship between creation by Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation, within the context of creation or any other context. In this section, I examine these options and show that the second is the most plausible.

1. Option One: Distinct, Separate Causal Theories

The first way Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation could be related as causal theories is that they are entirely distinct causal theories. Emanation is one type of causation; efficient causation is a different type of causation. In “Ibn Sina’s Ontology in his *Danishnama ‘ala’i*,” Thomas Gaskill argues that “God is the cause of causes by being the *final* cause of all causes.”²³⁸ According to Gaskill, the origination of the First Intellect by God is not efficient causal but final causal. The relationship between God and the First Intellect is

²³⁸ Gaskill, 315.

“one of final cause to effect,” not one of efficient cause to effect.²³⁹ Although Gaskill’s thesis is that Avicenna’s emanation is Zoroastrian rather than Neoplatonic, his claim helps one see how even Neoplatonic emanation might be interpreted as final causation. In chapter one, I noted the conceptual link between the perfection of the One and the procession of the universe from the One. The One is the *explanans* of the universe in this manner: the One’s perfection (and thus, its goodness) is the reason the universe exists, and the universe exists in order to be as perfect—as much like the One—as possible. By focusing on this conceptual link, a person could be persuaded to argue (like Gaskill) that God’s emanation is the final cause of the universe.

Problematically, understanding emanation only as final causation causes interpretive difficulties. Primarily, Avicenna asserts that an efficient cause brings about existence. A final cause is the purpose or end for which a thing exists. Final causation is not *productive*, and Avicenna never clearly describes it as such. Efficient causation, though, is clearly described as productive. So, one would have to offer a new interpretation of final causation, and it would be an interpretation that is not endorsed by Avicenna. Further, Avicenna clearly states

²³⁹ Gaskill, 317. In Gaskill’s paper, he argues that Avicenna’s emanation schema is heavily influenced by Zoroastrian cosmology. Gaskill argues that Avicenna’s conception of emanation is influenced by Zoroastrianism, and he sees this influence in the relationship he perceives between Avicenna’s incorporeal realm and the realm of matter (and things mixed with matter). Individuals in the incorporeal realm, Gaskill argues, are ‘archetypes’ of the material/mixed realm. While Gaskill offers an interesting interpretation, he fails to explain either (a) why Avicenna’s cosmology could not be influenced by both Zoroastrianism *and* Neoplatonism or (b) why other evidence of the influence of Neoplatonism on Avicenna’s cosmology (terminology, definitions, and subject matter—see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context* for an extended discussion) should be discounted. I do not deny the influence of Zoroastrianism upon Avicenna, nor do I deny that Avicenna describes God as *the* final cause of the universe. What I will argue is that final causation is not an originative causation: one does not bring about *x* by being the final cause of *x*. Instead, the final cause is the purpose for which *x* was brought about; the final cause is the goal or aim of *x*, and as much as it is possible, *x* will strive to be like its final cause. What Gaskill must explain (but does not) is how he reinterprets final causation to allow it to be productive. I argue that (1) Avicenna’s cosmology *is* Neoplatonic despite the influence of Zoroastrianism upon Avicenna’s cosmology and (2) Avicenna *clearly* asserts that God is *both* the efficient cause and final cause of the universe. By denying that emanation is efficient causation, Gaskill creates unnecessary interpretive difficulties for a reader of Avicenna—one must now explain (or explain away) Avicenna’s descriptions of God as an efficient cause.

in *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.6 that God is *both* the final and efficient cause of the universe. Interpreting emanation as final causation is helpful insofar as it accounts for how God is a final cause of the universe, but one would still have to explain how God is the efficient cause of the universe.

Similar problems would arise if one attempted to interpret emanation as either the material cause or formal cause of the universe. Because God's emanation is immaterial, it cannot be a material cause. God's emanation is not a formal cause, either. A formal cause, as noted in chapter one, is the form in which a thing is made. If God emanates the form of a thing, something intrinsic to that thing—namely, its form—is shared with God. This would violate Avicenna's claim that God is unique and independent. So, none of the other Aristotelian causes seem to be able to explain God's emanation, which means that they are not viable alternative explanations of the causal mechanism of emanation.

The other two types of causation prevalent in early Neoplatonic discussions of causation, paradigmatic causes and instrumental causes, are not helpful for explaining the causation that occurs when God emanates, either. Paradigmatic causes are the Separate Ideas. Instrumental causes are the agents responsible for bringing about motion in the sublunary realm.²⁴⁰ Accordingly, neither could explain what occurs when God emanates. Final, formal, material, paradigmatic, and instrumental causation—all types of causation that are distinct from efficient causation—can all be rejected as ways to understand the causation of emanation. If emanation and efficient causation were to be understood as distinct causal theories, then there would have to be some *other* way to explain the causal mechanism of emanation.

²⁴⁰ Wisnovsky, 67.

2. Option Two: Identical Causal Theories

The second option for understanding the relationship between Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation is that, at least with regards to creation, they are identical causal theories. What makes this view of the relation Neoplatonic emanation to efficient causation seem plausible is that, in both theories, causation is explained in a similar manner—perhaps an identical manner. Primarily, both types of causation involve an agent that somehow initiates the action. A metaphysical efficient cause is an agent who acts to bring about being, and a Neoplatonic emanator is an agent who, in the case of God, consents to bring about its emanation of the First Intellect. Not only does causation in each involve an agent, but also neither causal theory involves a patient. Also, it seems that causation could be voluntary or natural in each of these causal theories. Avicenna conceives of Neoplatonic emanation as either natural or voluntary, but God emanates the universe as the result of its volition, not nature. From Avicenna's description of metaphysical efficient causation, it seems that a metaphysical efficient cause could be either voluntary or natural. Additionally, Avicenna specifies that when an agent Neoplatonic emanates something or metaphysically efficiently causes something, that agent brings about the existence of something.

Support for the view that Neoplatonic emanation is a type of metaphysical efficient causation can be garnered from earlier Neoplatonic philosophers. The procession of being from the One was seen as efficient causation by Proclus and Asclepius.²⁴¹ Al-Farabi also

²⁴¹ Wisnovsky, 70; Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, eds. H. Saffrey and L. Westerink (Paris: 1968), vol 2.6, 40,9-27; Asclepius, in *Metaphysica*, ed. M Hayduck (Berlin: 1888), 4.1 223,34-36.

identified procession as efficient causation.²⁴² So, it seems that Avicenna's predecessors thought of Neoplatonic emanation as efficient causation, specifically the sort of efficient causation Avicenna terms metaphysical efficient causation. It would be unsurprising, then, if Avicenna also adopted this view. What is unclear is whether the Neoplatonic interpreters who influenced Avicenna understood Neoplatonic emanation to be a type of efficient causation or understood it to be identical to efficient causation.

If Neoplatonic emanation has the causal features that distinguished natural efficient causation from metaphysical efficient causation, it would bolster the claim that the two causal theories are identical. A metaphysical efficient cause brings about the existence of its effect, and the prior non-existence of the effect is not an important causal factor. In Avicenna's description of creation via Neoplatonic emanation, Avicenna clearly states that the universe originates from God's emanation of the First Intellect.²⁴³ The non-existence of the universe before God's emanation is *not* a causal factor in the eventual existence of the universe. So, both metaphysical efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation share this feature.

A metaphysical efficient cause co-exists with its effect. As long as the effect exists, one can be sure that the cause exists, for the cause is what is keeping the effect in existence. In Avicenna's narration of creation via Neoplatonic emanation, he distinguishes between possible and necessary beings. The First Intellect is a being that is possible in itself but is necessary through another.²⁴⁴ Avicenna uses this same language of necessity through another

²⁴² Wisnovsky, 109; Al-Farabi, *Kitab as-siyasat al-madaniyya al-mulaqqab bi-Mabadi; al-manjudat*, ed. F. Najjar (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), 49,12-15. See also Al-Farabi, *The Political Regime*, trans. Fauzi M. Najjar, in *Medieval Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 31-57.

²⁴³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 328 22-29.

²⁴⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 330 8-34.

when explaining that metaphysical efficient causes co-exist with their effects.²⁴⁵ As long as the effect exists, it is clear that the cause exists for both a metaphysical efficient cause and a Neoplatonic emanator.

Finally, a metaphysical efficient cause necessitates its effect. Assuming the appropriate conditions have been met, namely that there is no impediment to the metaphysical efficient cause bringing about its effect, the effect comes to exist.²⁴⁶ Similarly, assuming that God knows, wills, and has no impediment to emanating, God emanates the First Intellect.²⁴⁷ Again, the metaphysical efficient cause and the Neoplatonic emanator share this feature.

In order for this interpretation to be correct, there must be no differences between Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation. From Avicenna's account of Neoplatonic emanation, it is clear that God must emanate something similar to itself. Specifically, God must emanate one simple being. A longstanding principle of causation, however, is that effects must be like their causes in some way. Although Avicenna does not specify this causal principle with respect to metaphysical efficient causation, it seems fair to assume he believed this principle also applied to metaphysical efficient causation. So, it seems unlikely that there is a difference between the two accounts on this point.

Perhaps a difference between Neoplatonic emanation and metaphysical efficient causation is that a metaphysical efficient cause is said to bring about existence, but the exact action it takes to bring about existence is not specified. In contrast, causation by Neoplatonic emanation involves a specific type of action: diffusion of being. Causation by Neoplatonic emanation *must* occur in this manner; if causation does not occur via diffusion, then that

²⁴⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 197-200.

²⁴⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 200 6-35; Richardson, 46-47.

²⁴⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4 p. 327 1-3; *Liber De Philosophia Prima* IX.4.

causation cannot be Neoplatonic emanation. Avicenna does not specify whether metaphysical efficient causation occurs by diffusion, so it is unclear whether this is a feature of causation in both causal theories.

Further, Neoplatonic emanation involves intermediaries in creation. While it is true that God is the ultimate cause of the existence of the universe, God does not directly emanate anything except for the First Intellect. The First Intellect continues the chain of emanation, a chain which eventually results in the existence of the universe. If metaphysical efficient causation is identical to Neoplatonic emanation, then metaphysical efficient causation either would have to involve mediators in order to bring about something like the universe or else could explain God's causation of the First Intellect only. The only being that is directly caused by God is the First Intellect, but God is described as the efficient cause of the universe. So, it seems that in order for these two theories to be identical causal theories, both theories must involve mediators. Avicenna does not specify whether the metaphysical efficient causation of the universe is direct or mediated, so it is unclear whether this is a feature of both causal theories.

3. Option Three: Similar Causal Theories

Perhaps Neoplatonic emanation and efficient causation are not identical but are merely similar causal theories, at least within the context of creation. They are neither entirely distinct nor identical—there is some overlap in their explanatory power. Since causation by Neoplatonic emanation seems to occur only via a certain type of action but no such type of action is specified in the account of metaphysical efficient causation, a difference might be that Neoplatonic emanation occurs only via one type of action but metaphysical efficient causation could occur via many types of action. Additionally, it seems

that Neoplatonic emanation involves intermediaries in the causation of the universe, but it is not clear that metaphysical efficient causation does involve intermediaries. However, both theories (as noted above) share many similarities and deal with bringing something into existence. So, it seems that these theories are merely similar and not identical.

If it were the case that Neoplatonic emanation and metaphysical efficient causation were similar theories of causation, they might be related as species and sub-species. Metaphysical efficient causation does not, according to Avicenna's descriptions, entail only one type of action. Metaphysical efficient causation, then, could be the general manner in which being is brought about. Neoplatonic emanation in creation is one specific way to bring about being: by diffusion with the involvement of intermediaries. Neoplatonic emanation would be a type of metaphysical efficient causation, but there could (presumably) be other types of metaphysical efficient causation as well.

Even though these theories are nearly identical, it is unclear that they are, in fact, identical. The primary difference between these theories is that Avicenna specifies the type of action a Neoplatonic emanator performs, but he does not similarly specify the type of action a metaphysical efficient cause performs. Unless every effect of metaphysical efficient causation is brought about by diffusion, metaphysical efficient causation is not identical to Neoplatonic emanation. There is simply insufficient textual evidence to assert that these causal theories are identical. It seems most plausible, then, that these two causal theories are similar. Neoplatonic emanation is a sub-type of metaphysical efficient causation.

Despite the similarities, Neoplatonic emanation and metaphysical efficient causation are causal theories that overlap with respect to divine creation but are distinct in other ways. One way in which these causal theories are distinguished is the primacy given to Neoplatonic

emanation in Avicenna's account of divine creation. Whereas Avicenna deftly develops the implications of Aristotle's account of efficient causation, which allows him to explain creation in terms of metaphysical efficient causation, Avicenna uses Neoplatonic emanation to explain how God could be ultimately responsible for the existence of the universe. Metaphysical efficient causation is a causal theory that explains how it is possible that something can be created; Neoplatonic emanation provides the details of that creative process. Without the specific details provided in the theory of Neoplatonic emanation, Avicenna could not explain how a simple, changeless, immaterial being produces the universe as a whole. God, in emanating the First Intellect, produces a simple being; thus far, as long as metaphysical efficient causation is understood to be productive of being generally (and little emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of emanating versus producing more generally), metaphysical efficient causation can be used to understand this act. However, when Avicenna asserts that a multiplicity develops in the First Intellect because it is possible in itself yet necessary through another and that from the First Intellect contemplating this multiplicity arises the first celestial sphere, the soul of that sphere, and the Second Intellect, his causal analysis depends entirely upon the causal theory of Neoplatonic emanation. Additionally, when Avicenna asserts that this series of emanations of Intellects, celestial spheres, and the soul of each of those spheres cannot continue *ad infinitum* and uses this assertion to justify his claim that the Giver of Forms must produce a terrestrial sphere, he relies upon the causal theory of Neoplatonic emanation. While it is true that if Avicenna did *not* adhere to Neoplatonic emanation as a causal theory, he would not be constrained by the presupposition that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced, adherence to Neoplatonic emanation allowed him to cope with the tensions between his

philosophical commitments and his faith commitment. Thus, I contend that Neoplatonic emanation is not only Avicenna's primary means of explaining divine creation but is also the more fundamental causal theory within the context of creation. Avicenna uses metaphysical efficient causation as a means of justifying creating as a type of efficient causation, but he uses Neoplatonic emanation to explain precisely what creating is. The philosophical theory that Avicenna uses to do the bulk of the work, so to speak, in his explication of creating is Neoplatonic emanation.

It seems that Avicenna holds on to these two theories of causation because each is useful in unique ways. Aristotelian metaphysical efficient causation provides the theoretical support for Avicenna's claim that being can be originated. The universe has a beginning, and it is initially brought into existence out of nothing. Metaphysical efficient causation explains how that is possible, but the theory itself provides no immediately clear way for Avicenna to continue to assert divine simplicity. As noted in chapter 1, God's simplicity and unity is one of the defining characteristics of Islam, and the mere appearance that one's philosophical theory posited multiplicity in God—as positing God as the direct efficient cause of the entire universe *might* have—was something most philosophers considered to be worth avoiding. Neoplatonic emanation allows Avicenna to explain how God could be ultimately responsible for the universe without impugning God's simplicity or, it turns out, impugning God's free, voluntary creation of that universe. While there is significant overlap and it seems that Neoplatonic emanation could be a subtype of metaphysical efficient cause, each causal model is used to clarify and explain God's production of the universe.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have defended the claim that Avicenna solves the ‘problem of creation’ presented in chapter one by assuming the truth of the Neoplatonic model of creation. Avicenna explains that Neoplatonic emanation is indeed compatible with the Islamic conception of creation because Neoplatonic emanation can be voluntary. Despite Avicenna’s clear presentation of creation as emanation, Avicenna also describes God’s creative act as efficient causation. I have explained both what type of efficient cause God is—a metaphysical efficient cause—and why Avicenna believes such a type of efficient causation must exist. Finally, I have attempted to explain the relationship between metaphysical efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation within the context of creation. These two theories are clearly either similar theories or identical theories. If they are similar theories, it seems the best way to understand their similarity is to consider one theory to be a sub-type of the other theory. I suggest that Neoplatonic emanation is best understood as a sub-type of metaphysical efficient causation. Avicenna’s theory of causation initially appears to be fundamentally Neoplatonic because of his focus on emanation, but in light of his extended discussion of metaphysical efficient causation, it is clear that Avicenna does not think of creating exclusively in terms of Neoplatonic emanation. Avicenna has found a way for causation by Neoplatonic emanation and causation by a metaphysical efficient cause to co-exist in his theoretical framework, namely by sublimating Neoplatonic emanation as a sub-type of metaphysical efficient causation more generally. Fundamentally, however, Avicenna uses the conceptual tools provided within the theory of Neoplatonic emanation to explain the mechanics of creating.

CHAPTER THREE

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall defend the claim that Aquinas takes for granted the truth of the Aristotelian model of causation by reviewing Aquinas's discussions of God creating and showing that in these discussions, Aquinas calls God an efficient cause of what comes to exist and discusses God's causation of what exists in terms of efficient causation. I also defend the claim that, for Aquinas, Aristotelian efficient causation is not incompatible with God creating *ex nihilo*. While Aristotle presents efficient causation in which an agent activates some potentiality and focuses on examples of efficient causation in which a patient underlies the change, Aquinas asserts that Aristotle dwells upon one *type* of efficient causation—namely, natural efficient causation—and that there is another *type* of efficient causation—namely, efficient causation of being, which does not involve any patient underlying the change. Aquinas does not take Aristotle's account of efficient causation to be exhaustive of all cases of efficient causation. Despite Aquinas's presentation and discussion of creation in terms of efficient causation, Aquinas also discusses creation in terms of emanation. I claim that Aquinas's interpretation of emanation varies greatly from Avicenna's interpretation. Aquinas seems to mean nothing distinctive from the efficient causation of being when he uses the term 'emanation' in the context of creating.

II. An Aristotelian Approach

Contrary to Avicenna, who explains God creating primarily in a manner which conforms to the details of Neoplatonic emanation, Aquinas explains God creating primarily in a manner that conforms to Aristotelian efficient causation. In this section, I will defend the claim that Aquinas takes God to be an efficient cause of creation when God creates. To do so, I will present what Aquinas understands to be efficient causation in ordinary cases—that is, in the sorts of cases involving an agent activating some potentiality in a patient. I will then present evidence that Aquinas not only describes God as the efficient cause of the universe but also speaks of the details of creation in ways that align with efficient causation. Based on Aquinas's explication of God creating, it will become clear to the reader that Aquinas understands Aristotelian efficient causation to be the fundamental way to think of divine creating.

A. Aristotelian Efficient Causation

In the first chapter, it was shown that an Aristotelian efficient cause is an agent that actualizes some potentiality in something. So, a sculptor actualizes the potentiality of bronze to be in the shape of Aphrodite, thus bringing about a statue with the form of Aphrodite. An efficient cause is, in some sense, prior to its effect. An efficient cause could bring about its effects as the result of its will or its nature. If Aquinas does more than label God the efficient cause of the universe, then one can expect to find him describing God creating in a way that emphasizes the fact that God's action brings about the effect, that God is somehow prior to the effect, that God acts either as a result of God's will or God's nature, and that God is either the proximate or distal cause of the effect. Our examination will include

Aquinas's discussion of divine creating and the six days of creation found in his *Summa Theologiae*, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*.

B. Aquinas on Creation

In this study, I will examine Aquinas's account of creating insofar as it conforms to an account of efficient causation—but not at the expense of ignoring or discounting Aquinas's account of creating insofar as it conforms to the creation narrative in Genesis. Some of the details of Aquinas's explication of the biblical account of creating are interesting but not necessary to show that Aquinas takes God creating to be an instance of efficient causation, but neither are such omitted details contrary to the claim that Aquinas's account of God's action in creating is an instance of efficient causation. The account presented below is not comprehensive but is representative of Aquinas's description of God creating.

Before delving into a discussion of Aquinas's account of God creating, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of what Aquinas means when he talks about creation. According to Aquinas in his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, creation can be thought of in terms of the creator or in terms of the created. In terms of the creator, the act of creation is an action that occurs without any preceding causes.²⁴⁸ By “without any preceding causes,” Aquinas means that the act of creation occurs by “the action of the primary cause alone.”²⁴⁹ Nothing other than God, then, brings about the effect. In terms of the created, the act of creation is the act that brings about the existence of created beings from nothing preexisting.²⁵⁰ Aquinas asserts here and elsewhere that the act of creation is an

²⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.3 in *Aquinas on Creation: Writings on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* 2.1.1, trans. Steven Baldner and William Carroll (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), 80.

²⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.3 (p. 80).

²⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.3 (p. 80).

act that neither presupposes some preexisting material nor relies upon any such preexisting material. Instead, creation is the production of being *from nothing that preexists said being*.²⁵¹ Creation is, by definition, an action of God that brings about the existence of beings other than God's self, and in such an act being is brought about *ex nihilo*.

When Aquinas describes this act of God, Aquinas consistently speaks in terms of efficient causation. Aquinas's famous 'five ways' include the argument that because there cannot be an infinite chain of efficient causes, some first efficient cause must exist in order to account for the existence of the universe.²⁵² This first efficient cause is called God "by everyone," Aquinas asserts.²⁵³ Aquinas makes a similar argument in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* book two, where he presents Aristotle's argument from motion for a first efficient cause.²⁵⁴ While these examples illustrate that Aquinas seems comfortable applying the language of efficient causation to creation, one could ask whether these examples are representative of Aquinas's general conception of divine creating. In exploring whether Aquinas genuinely believes divine creating to be an instance of divine efficient causation—more specifically, Aristotelian efficient causation—it will be necessary to examine Aquinas's account of God creating for elements of Aristotelian efficient causation.²⁵⁵

1. God's action brings about the effect

To understand why Aquinas specifies that creating is performed by *God* in his definition of creation, it is necessary to understand what Aquinas says God is like. In his

²⁵¹ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (ST) Ia.45.1; Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.1; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) II.16.

²⁵² Aquinas, ST Ia.2.3.

²⁵³ Aquinas, ST Ia.2.3.

²⁵⁴ Aquinas, SCG II.6.

²⁵⁵ For the course of this exploration, I will set aside the concern regarding whether creation *could* be Aristotelian efficient causation given that divine creating involves nothing underlying the act. I will address this objection in section B of this chapter.

Summa Contra Gentiles, Aquinas asserts that God is an eternal, changeless, immaterial being.²⁵⁶

God is personal, which means that God has attributes commonly associated with personhood. According to Aquinas, God has an intellect, which means that God is a thinking being. Additionally, God is a being who has a will. And, in a manner somewhat similar to how human wills operate, God's will is guided by God's intellect. God's intellect determines what is God's good, and God's will seeks that thing.²⁵⁷ What is good is the existence of God, and thus God wills God's own existence.²⁵⁸

Unlike Avicenna, who would embrace Aquinas's conception of God thus far, Aquinas also asserts that God is triune. Without heading into a excursus on Trinitarian theology, suffice it to say that Aquinas believes that God is a being that shares one substance—one underlying nature—in three unified persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁹ Although Aquinas holds to this distinctive theology, he nonetheless maintains that the triune God has the characteristics classically attributed to God, characteristics that apply to all three persons of the Godhead.

Despite his claim that God is triune, Aquinas upholds the doctrine of divine simplicity. Because God is an immaterial being, God is neither a body nor is composed of matter and form.²⁶⁰ Aquinas asserts that God's essence is identical to God's nature, and that God's essence is identical to God's existence.²⁶¹ Even though God exists in three persons, those persons share the same nature; accordingly, Aquinas would not have believed Trinitarian theology to inconsistent with divine simplicity. Complex beings have causes, but

²⁵⁶ Aquinas, *SCG* I.15, 17, 18.

²⁵⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.1.

²⁵⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.2.

²⁵⁹ See Aquinas, *ST* Ia, questions 27-43.

²⁶⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.4.1-2.

²⁶¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.4.3-4.

God is the uncaused cause.²⁶² Thus, God is simple. God's nature, then, is identical with God's essence, God's existence, God's knowledge, and God's will.

Aquinas, like Avicenna, asserts that God is an eternal, changeless, simple, immaterial being because God is a necessary being that is fully actualized. God cannot fail to exist, and God is a being who is entirely self-sufficient. God does not depend on any other being for God's existence. In addition, God is a fully actualized being. That is, God is a being in which no potency can be found; instead, God is a being that is pure act.²⁶³ Aquinas appeals to the claim that God is pure act to justify his earlier assertion that God is simple: every composite has potency and actuality, but God is not a composite. Since God exists, God cannot be pure potency; instead, God is pure actuality.²⁶⁴

Among these attributes of God, Aquinas dwells on the notion of God as pure act in his explanation of creation. The fact that God is the pure act explains why God—this eternal, changeless, immaterial, Trinitarian being—performs the action of creating instead of some other being performing the action of creating. Aquinas repeatedly asserts that “every agent acts according as it is in act.”²⁶⁵ An effect brought about by a being that is both active and passive—has some things about itself which are actualized and some things about itself which are merely potentialities—will reflect this division of act and potency: in such a case, the effect will also be both active and passive. Because material objects are both active and passive insofar as they are composed of (passive) matter and (active) form, one might think that *any* being which is active and passive could bring about a material object. Aquinas thinks of things differently. A material object can bring about another material object by actualizing

²⁶² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.4.7.

²⁶³ Aquinas, *SCG* II.16. Aquinas addresses the notion of God being pure act in *On the Power of God* 3.1, as well.

²⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.4.7.

²⁶⁵ Aquinas, *SCG* II.6; see also *On the Power of God* 3.1.

some potency in that object. A sculptor actualizes the lump of bronze into a statue. Take away the bronze, however, and the sculptor is unable to make the statue. The sculptor cannot snap her fingers and produce more bronze. Aquinas argues that the sculptor lacks the ability to bring more bronze into existence because she, as a material being, causes things to happen through motion.²⁶⁶ She can cause a dog to bark by clapping her hands loudly and suddenly. She can cause a car to slow by pushing on the left pedal. By manipulating the material world around her, she can bring about her desired effect. What she cannot do is bring about some effect *without* manipulating the world around her. All of her effects can be produced because she is effecting something that already exists. She is limited in her causal abilities by the fact that she is a being in act and in potency. Specifically, she is limited to causing by motion, a means of causation that requires preexisting matter.²⁶⁷

God, who is fully actualized, does not have this limitation. According to Aquinas, a fully actualized being is not limited to actualizing some potentiality in other things (or in itself). Instead, a fully actualized being can, in virtue of its own actuality, bring about the existence of other things out of nothing. Whereas the sculptor cannot snap her fingers and produce more bronze, God can bring about the existence of the sculptor, the bronze, or the statue (or all of the above), using no pre-existing material to do so. God is not limited in action by the non-existence of the sculptor, the bronze, or the statue. God lacks such limitations because “effects correspond proportionally to their causes,” meaning that a fully actualized being can produce any effect.²⁶⁸ This is not to say that God’s action has no limits: Aquinas argues that God’s actions are determined by God’s will and God’s knowledge (more

²⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.2. ad 1 (p. 76); *ST* Ia.45.5.

²⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.5.

²⁶⁸ Aquinas, *SCG* II.21. On this point, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle’s *Physics* II.3 195b52.

on this below) and that God cannot do what is logically impossible.²⁶⁹ Because God is the only fully actualized being, God is the only being capable of creating.²⁷⁰

Further, God is able to create because as a fully actualized and immaterial being, God can act by God's total substance. And, only an agent that can act by the totality of its substance can produce a total substance as its effect. Our sculptor, as a material being composed of matter and form, is doubly limited: there are certain things which she cannot do because they are contrary to her nature—she cannot give birth to a non-human, for example—and there are certain things that she cannot do because they are contrary to her abilities as a hylomorphic compound of matter and form. As noted above, she cannot be fully actualized, since her material existence inherently involves some potency. In addition to entailing that our sculptor cannot create because she is not fully actualized, the fact that she is a material being entails that she cannot act by the entirety of her substance. Since only some of her substance is actualized and she acts by those parts of her which are actualized, she acts by part of her substance. God, however, is an entirely immaterial being, and thus God can act by the totality of God's substance. Because God can act by the totality of God's substance, God can bring about the existence of a total substance in its entirety without any preexisting matter.²⁷¹

Not only is God the sole being with the capability of creating, God must be the creator because Aquinas understands the notion that “effects correspond proportionally to their causes” to have further application not only to the actuality or potentiality of effects but also the particularity or universality of effects.²⁷² According to Aquinas, there is one

²⁶⁹ See Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.4, I.3.15; *ST* Ia.25.3.

²⁷⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.1.

²⁷¹ Aquinas, *SCG* II.20.

²⁷² Aquinas, *SCG* II.21. On this point, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle's *Physics* II.3 195b52.

action that is universal: the action of being. Because being is everywhere, being is a universal act. Aquinas clarifies that by the action of being, he does not mean each specific being: he does not mean this being, say, a horse named Ed; instead, he means being as such.²⁷³ The cause of this universal action, then, must *also* be universal. This first and universal agent is God.²⁷⁴

God alone is able to create because God alone has the power to create. A more powerful agent has a higher capacity for actualizing potency than a less powerful agent.²⁷⁵ A human, for example, is a more powerful agent than a poinsettia plant. A human can take wood and build a desk; a poinsettia can grow roots that disturb the soil. Humans are able to actualize potentialities in a wide range of things, whereas poinsettias have a limited ability to do so. An agent more powerful than a human being could actualize the minutest potentiality in a thing.²⁷⁶ An agent yet more powerful would not need any potentiality to actualize; instead, such an agent has the power to actualize no potency, that is, to bring something into existence from nothing.

So far, Aquinas's account of creation aligns with Aristotelian efficient causation. God acts to create, and in so doing, God is the cause of all things by bringing about existence as such. God is able to create because God is fully actualized, God is immaterial and capable of acting through God's entire substance, and God is powerful enough not to need potency to actualize. God is the efficient cause of the universe because God, and God alone, is the cause of what exists.

²⁷³ Aquinas, *SCG* II.21; the example is mine.

²⁷⁴ Aquinas, *SCG* II.21; Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.5.

²⁷⁵ Aquinas, *SCG* II.20.

²⁷⁶ Aquinas, *SCG* II.20.

2. God acts by will

God, then, has the ability to create, but one might ask whether God must create, or does God create because God wills to create. Aquinas argues clearly and consistently that God does not create due to some natural necessity on God's part. Nothing in God's nature requires that God creates, Aquinas writes, and he offers several arguments to that end. It is interesting to note, though, that Aquinas does not offer any arguments that God creates by will in the *Summa Theologiae*: there, he instead argues more generally that God acts by will, and one can presumably apply this fact to all of God's acts, including creation. In both his *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *On the Power of God*, Aquinas offers what may be grouped as three arguments with the conclusion that God acts by will in creating. In the first argument, the conclusion is that God's action is not determined to one effect, and thus God must act by will. In the second, the conclusion is that God acts for an end, and an agent can act for an end only by will. In the third, the conclusion is that every effect is in its cause in some way, and God causing by intellect and will explain how this is possible.

In the first argument, Aquinas begins with the premise that nature determines an agent's action to one effect.²⁷⁷ In the right circumstances, the agent will produce that one effect.²⁷⁸ For example, an animal bred under the right circumstances will produce a more of that kind of animal, but it will not produce a different kind of animal.²⁷⁹ Voluntary effects, though, may or may not occur in a variety of circumstances.²⁸⁰ A person may will at time t_1 , while he is watching television, to read a book, and he might watch television days later

²⁷⁷ Aquinas, *SCG* II.23; Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

²⁷⁸ Aquinas, *SCG* II.23.

²⁷⁹ This, of course, is true *most* of the time but not *all* of the time. A horse can be bred with a donkey to produce a mule. Aquinas (and Aristotle, for that matter) would likely have been unaware of this odd circumstance. However, the principle holds for an animal bred with the same kind of animal. When a horse is bred with a horse, a foal is produced. When a dolphin is bred with a dolphin, a dolphin is produced.

²⁸⁰ Aquinas, *SCG* II.23.

without then willing to read a book. His willing to read a book is related to but not contingent upon his circumstances. Another feature of voluntary effects is that an agent may will many things. Instead of willing to read a book while watching television, a man could easily will to go for a walk or call his spouse or water the plants. In exactly similar circumstances, he may will to do different things at different times. Notice, again, that each of these examples of things he might will are things he has the ability to perform. With regard to the divine will, Aquinas notes that God has the power to perform anything that is not logically impossible, that is, that does not imply a logical contradiction.²⁸¹ God's act, then, is not ordered to one effect only.²⁸²

Aquinas offers an interesting variation of this argument. Instead of focusing on God's power, he focuses on the fact that an agent acting by nature produces an effect that is its equal.²⁸³ A dolphin produces another dolphin, which is an effect that is equal to itself. Unless a natural agent is hindered by a defect, either in itself or in its patient, it will always produce an effect equal to itself.²⁸⁴ The world, however, is not filled entirely with effects that are equal to their causes. This is true in two ways. First, if God created by nature, then the universe would have to be equal to God; but given the fact that nothing can be equal to God, this is impossible. Second, the creatures populating the universe are not equal to each other: humans are more advanced creatures than felines, and felines are more advanced creatures

²⁸¹ Aquinas, *SCG* II.22. Aquinas offers a separate argument to this effect in this chapter. He says that whatever does not imply contradiction is subject to God's power. Numerous entities—both those which actually exist and those which can merely be thought of—are things which do not imply contradiction. However, God does only some of these things (as evidenced by the fact that not all of these non-contradictory beings exist). Aquinas introduces the premise that any time an agent could do a number of things but does only some of them, the agent has exercised its will. So, God must have exercised God's will in determining what to create. Therefore, God acts by will and not natural necessity in creating. Given the similarities between this argument and the premise noted in the argument above, I will not be discussing this argument separately.

²⁸² Aquinas, *SCG* II.23.

²⁸³ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

²⁸⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

than poinsettias.²⁸⁵ So, either God is hindered by some defect or else God wills these inequalities to exist. Aquinas resoundingly rejects the first disjunct: God is not hindered by some defect in God's nature because God is perfect, and God is not hindered by some defect in the patient, for no patient underlies creation.²⁸⁶ Accordingly, the only remaining explanation for the inequality in the universe is God's will.

In the second argument, Aquinas begins with the premise that, according to his interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ, the universe is ordered toward an end.²⁸⁷ In order for the universe to be directed toward an end, the universe must be directed by an intellect.²⁸⁸ While it is true that agents acting by nature do act for an end, an agent acting by nature does not have any knowledge of the end for which it acts. An agent acting by nature just *happens* to act toward an end because it is, by nature, directed toward an end. An agent acting by nature does not determine its own end. Instead, something else has determined the end toward which that agent would act by its nature.²⁸⁹ So, even natural agents that act toward an end must be directed toward that end by some intelligent agent. Since the agents in the universe act toward an end, the agent responsible for the universe must be an intelligent

²⁸⁵ For Aquinas, this is a crucial point to make. Aquinas subscribes to species essentialism, which means that each member of a species (here, specifically species of material beings) belongs to that species essentially. A human belongs to the species of humanity because that is simply what it means to be a human. With respect to his argument here, this view means that a human cannot come from anything other than a human. So, there is no way to explain how these diverse, unequal creatures can coexist. One cannot appeal to a theory akin to Darwinian evolution to explain the origins of creatures, for it is, in Aquinas's reckoning, simply impossible that an elephant could come—through thousands (if not millions) of years and thousands of smaller changes in response to environmental pressures—from a whale. An animal cannot change species because if that animal exists, it is a member of a species. Animals do not change species, so the inequality between animals must have some other explanation. The only explanations Aquinas can fathom is that some being is responsible for creating these inequalities (and thus this creator acts by will, or else there would not be inequalities) or these inequalities are the result of chance. Given the fact that Aquinas later argues that the universe has an end, he will reject the latter option. Chance cannot explain these inequalities. For Aquinas's species essentialism, see Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965), 119.

²⁸⁶ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

²⁸⁷ Aquinas refers to *Metaphysics* XI.10 (1075a 12).

²⁸⁸ Aquinas, *SCG* II.223.

²⁸⁹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

agent that can direct others toward an end. Accordingly, this intelligent agent creates not by nature but by will, which is informed by knowledge.²⁹⁰

The third argument Aquinas presents begins with the premise that effects are like their causes in some way. Aquinas explains this purported likeness by asserting that the effect must preexist in the causing agent in some way.²⁹¹ And whatever preexists in the causing agent must exist in the mode of the causing agent. Because God is an immaterial, intellectual being, the effects must preexist in God's intellect.²⁹² Aquinas then asserts that the intellect produces an effect only by the exercise of the agent's will.²⁹³ The will executes what is in the intellect, and the intellect moves the will.²⁹⁴ Accordingly, God must act by God's will when God creates.

It is now clear that Aquinas takes God creating to be an act of will. God does not act to create because God's nature makes God act. Instead, God acts because God wills to act. As noted above, Aquinas draws a close connection between knowledge and will. Knowledge moves the will to act, and thus God's knowledge moves the will to act. As with Avicenna, one might object that divine simplicity, which entails that God's essence is identical to God's knowledge, means that God's actions are indeed necessitated by God's nature. However, Aquinas could respond (like Avicenna) that an agent acting by its nature performs an action that does not involve its will. Because God's action does involve God's will—even in its identity with God's essence—this action is a volitional action.

²⁹⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15; *SCG* II.23.

²⁹¹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

²⁹² Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15; *SCG* II.23.

²⁹³ Aquinas, *SCG* II.23.

²⁹⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

3. The effect which God brings about is being

As noted above, when God creates, God creates being as such. The discussion above distinguished the production of “being as such” with the production of “this being,” that is, with the production of this specific, individual existing thing. In light of this discussion, one might wonder whether Aquinas asserts that God creates *being* without differentiating being into specific, individual existing things. And, if God does differentiate being, then it remains to be seen how God does this. It might be the case that God differentiates some being—for example, God creates angels—but God allows these creatures to be the agents that differentiate other beings—for example, perhaps angels produce material beings. This latter discussion entails an explanation of whether Aquinas’s account of creation diverges from Avicenna’s account, for Avicenna says that God creates one simple being, and this being is the source of numerical difference and qualitative difference in the universe. According to Aquinas, God does differentiate being directly, and God creates immaterial beings (angels) and material beings directly. He argues that God is able to create this multiplicity directly because God creates by will and not by nature.

a. What God Creates

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas asserts that God creating involves the production of being as such. Because God brings about the existence of being other than God’s own being, God has brought about being as such. He does not, however, assert that God creating produces entirely undifferentiated being.²⁹⁵ Instead, God brings about this being and that being, but because none of these beings existed before God creates, God is

²⁹⁵ When Aquinas considers whether God creates formless, undifferentiated matter, he determines that God would not create formless matter. According to Aquinas, if God created matter whose formlessness preceded its time in formation, any form the matter later had would inhere in the matter as an accident rather than a form. *ST* Ia.66.1-2.

said to bring about being as such. Thus, it is correct that being is the proper object of creation, but what God produces are specific, individuated beings.²⁹⁶

One such class of individuated beings that God creates are angels. In his discussion of the creation of immaterial substances—that is, angels—Aquinas asserts that God directly brings about the existence of angels.²⁹⁷ Repeating that everything that exists other than God has God as its cause, Aquinas applies this statement to angelic beings. Given that angels are immaterial beings and God is an immaterial being, it seems clear that God could create such beings. Angels, however, were not produced by God from eternity.²⁹⁸ Instead, God existed without the angels also existing.²⁹⁹

Aquinas's attention to God's creation of angelic beings might give the mistaken impression that angels were created before other beings were created. Aquinas denies that angels were created before other aspects of the universe, namely the empyrean heavens and the earth.³⁰⁰ Angels were created simultaneously with the rest of the universe. So, when God acts to create, God creates the universe—which includes the sidereal heavens, the empyrean heavens, stars, and the earth—and what populates the universe—which includes immaterial and material beings—in one act.³⁰¹

Material beings, too, are created by God.³⁰² Despite the differences between God and material beings, Aquinas asserts that one cause must be common to all existing beings.³⁰³

²⁹⁶ Aquinas, *SCG* II.21.

²⁹⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.61.1.

²⁹⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.61.2.

²⁹⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.61.2. Here, I avoid saying that God existed at time t_1 but angels did not exist at time t_1 because time did not exist before creation.

³⁰⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.61.3.

³⁰¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.61.3; Aquinas discusses the sidereal heaven explicitly in *ST* Ia.66.3.

³⁰² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.1.

³⁰³ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.1.

Material beings are made on account of God's goodness.³⁰⁴ All being reflects God's goodness, and the whole of the universe has God as its end, including material beings.³⁰⁵

Despite the variety of material beings, Aquinas insists that God is the direct cause of what comes into existence at the moment of creation and ultimate end of all that exists.³⁰⁶

b. Whether God creating is a mediated action

God is said to be the ultimate cause—in Aquinas's language, the principle—of what exists, including that which is material and that which is immaterial. God creates the angels, the empyrean heavens, the sidereal heavens, and the terrestrial realm (and all of its inhabitants). However, one should note that Avicenna could assent to the same statement: he could agree that God is the ultimate cause or principle of all that exists other than God's self. Avicenna would emphasize that God is the *ultimate* but not *proximate* cause of all that exists, for God cannot directly produce the multiplicity of beings which are numerically and qualitatively distinct. Further, because Aristotle discusses efficient causes which are direct causes of effects and efficient causes which are indirect causes of effects—their causation of that effect is mediated by some other thing—it seems that Aquinas could assert, like Avicenna, that God causes some things directly but other things indirectly. Aquinas acknowledges that efficient causes could bring about their effects directly or mediately, but he asserts that in creating, God directly brings about the existence of the universe and what populates it.

After arguing that God is the ultimate source of material beings, Aquinas considers whether angels are the agents who bring about the existence of material beings, either in their entirety or merely by producing their forms. Aquinas determines that angels do not

³⁰⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.2.

³⁰⁵ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.2 ad 1, ad 2.

³⁰⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.2 ad 3.

bring about the existence of material beings.³⁰⁷ Instead of producing material beings *through* the power of angels, God produces material beings directly. Aquinas argues that the higher or more powerful the cause, the more numerous effects to which it will extend. The most general effect, then, will have the highest cause. And being is the most general effect—it is shared by every existing thing. Thus, being can come from God alone because God is the most powerful and highest cause.³⁰⁸ Additionally, Aquinas notes that agents are only able to produce something if they are designed so as to be predisposed to do that thing.³⁰⁹ For example, dogs can mate and produce puppies only because part of what it means to be a dog is to be able to produce more dogs (given the right circumstances and the absence of any significant defects). Above, we saw Aquinas's definition of creation as production with nothing presupposed. Since this predisposition to produce must be presupposed by any created agent, that agent could produce something but could not, by definition, create something.³¹⁰

Aquinas then addresses whether the angels perhaps create the forms of material bodies but do not create the entirety of the material being. Here, Aquinas again relies upon his previously discussed notion of creation as production from nothing in order to say that angels do not create the forms of material beings. Angels are immaterial beings, but they are not the simple, fully actualized immaterial being that God is. Thus, they are not able to create.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ As discussed above, God is the only being capable of producing something *ex nihilo*.

³⁰⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.3 resp.

³⁰⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.3 resp.

³¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.65.3 resp.

³¹¹ For an interesting discussion of the production of souls and what role beings other than God play in the production of souls according to Aquinas, see John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of Esse" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (2000): 197-213. See also Kara Richardson, "The Metaphysics of Agency: Avicenna and his Legacy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2008). Unfortunately, that discussion falls outside the scope of this project.

c. Whether God produces multiple Quantitatively and Qualitatively Diverse Things

Following what Aquinas says about the direct production of beings by God, Aquinas asserts that God creates diverse things immediately or directly.³¹² To borrow language from Avicenna's discussion of creation, God creates a multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively different beings directly. Avicenna, in his discussion of creation, offered extensive philosophical analysis to show that God does not create this multiplicity directly, for to say that God directly creates a multiplicity is to suggest that God is not simple. Aquinas, in contrast, clearly asserts that God creates this multiplicity directly. What remains to be seen is whether Aquinas's assertion about God's immediate creation of numerically and qualitatively different beings implies multiplicity in God. To further this discussion, it is necessary to explore whether Aquinas believes that asserting God's direct creation of this multiplicity implies multiplicity in God. It is also necessary to explore how Aquinas believes that God can create this multiplicity in light of Aquinas's commitment to the principle that effects resemble their cause.

In his *On the Power of God*, Aquinas discusses whether a multitude of things can proceed from God. On this issue, Aquinas's opinion is in stark contrast Avicenna's position. Aquinas asserts that a multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively different beings can be produced by one being—even one simple being—as long as the cause is not determined to its effect.³¹³ If a cause is determined to its effect, then the effect is necessitated by the cause. Aquinas does not attempt to explain an effect necessitated by its cause in terms of natural necessity or volitional necessity. Instead, Aquinas considers which sorts of causes could be determined to their effects.

³¹² Aquinas, *SCG* II.22.

³¹³ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

When Aquinas speaks of what it means for an effect to be necessitated by a cause, he asserts that of Aristotle's four causes, only an efficient or a material cause can be determined to an effect.³¹⁴ With both material causes and efficient causes, the cause precedes the effect in being. Aquinas rejects the notion that formal causes could necessitate their effects, for the effect has its being by its form; thus, a formal cause and its effect exist simultaneously. A final cause precedes its effect in intention but not in being: the final cause of something—say, a house—is determined before the house itself begins to exist. Since a final cause does not precede its effect in being, it is not determined to one effect. A material cause, however, does precede its effect in being, for the material cause is the matter out of which the effect is composed. An efficient cause precedes its effect in being because an efficient cause is the agent that brings about its effect. So, if a cause is determined to its effect, that cause will be either a material or efficient cause.³¹⁵

In the context of whether God creating is a cause determined to its effect, it should already be clear that Aquinas will focus on efficient causes and not material causes. One of the hallmarks of divine creating is that the effect is produced *ex nihilo*, which means that there is no material cause of divine creating. Thus, no material cause could determine God's action of creating to one effect.³¹⁶ With that, Aquinas focuses on whether there are any reasons to assert that the first efficient cause—God—would be determined to one effect in creating.

If Aquinas agreed with Avicenna's analysis regarding the principle that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced, he would state his acceptance of the principle at this point. He does not. Instead, Aquinas considers whether there is anything at

³¹⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

³¹⁵ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

³¹⁶ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

all about God that determines God's action to one effect. Avicenna asserts that God's simplicity determines God to one effect, but Aquinas focuses not on God's simplicity but on God's power.³¹⁷ In God, there is "active power to the highest degree," which means both that God is a being that lacks passive powers (that is, God cannot be acted upon) and that God has the power to do anything other than what is logically contradictory.³¹⁸

If God's power is not determined to one effect, then God's efficient causation is not determined to one effect. Aquinas quickly affirms the antecedent, asserting that God's power is infinite.³¹⁹ In his earlier discussion of whether God's power is infinite, Aquinas asserts that God's power is infinite by way of negation: God's power has no end.³²⁰ God's power, like God's wisdom and essence and goodness, is without limit. And, given that God is a fully actualized being, God is a being of infinite act. God is infinite act because God's act is limited neither by any agent nor by any recipient. Because God is the actor and God has infinite power, God's act is not limited by any agent. To illustrate how something can be limited by a recipient, Aquinas provides the example of the heat of a furnace being limited by the disposition of the fuel. God, however, is a being lacking any passive potency.³²¹ Because God is a self-subsistent being, God cannot be limited by a recipient in a manner similar to the heat being limited by its fuel. God's infinite power and infinite act are corollaries of God being fully actualized, and thus God's act is not limited to one effect.

Were God's infinite power determined to one effect, then that effect would reflect God's infinite power. Yet, the only being which can reflect God's infinite power is another

³¹⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp. This focus may perhaps be unsurprising in a work titled, *On the Power of God*.

³¹⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.25.1. See below for an extended discussion of the link between action and efficient causation.

³¹⁹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

³²⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 1.2 resp.

³²¹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 1.2 resp.

being with infinite power. So, if God's power were determined to one effect, God would be creating another god. However, this is impossible: God is eternal and uncreated. The absurdity of what follows from the supposition that God's power is determined to one effect shows the supposition itself to be absurd as well.³²²

Aquinas explicitly considers Avicenna's principle that from one simple thing, only one simple thing can be produced.³²³ Aquinas seems to believe that what underlies this principle is the belief that an effect must be like its cause. When rebutting this principle, Aquinas asserts that there is a likeness between God and the universe, but this likeness is not equality. God, in creating, produces something distinct but similar to God. Accordingly, God does not produce something nearly identical to God as is produced when someone makes an additional copy of something. Instead, God makes something that is similar to yet different from God. Because there is not equality between God and the universe—because they are not identical, are not of the same substance, and do not each exist as fully actualized, simple, self-subsisting beings—there is no reason to expect that God must produce one simple being.³²⁴

In response to the objection that God creating a multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively distinct beings posits some plurality in God, Aquinas responds that God's production of the multiplicity of beings does not reveal any multiplicity in God's nature. The origin of the multiplicity of being, he says, is God's knowledge and will.³²⁵ God has

³²² Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp. Aquinas also considers if God's act were determined to some effect not equal to God, that is, beneath God's power. Aquinas asserts that were this the case, God's power would not be determined to any particular effect. See *On the Power of God* 3.16 resp.

³²³ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16.7.

³²⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 ad 7.

³²⁵ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 ad 14.

knowledge of a variety of beings, and thus God is able to produce a variety of beings.³²⁶ God has knowledge of many things, but God has this knowledge through one act.³²⁷ As mentioned above, Aquinas believes that all things which are eventually created by God preexist in God's intellect, and these things are brought into existence by God's will. Aquinas does not believe that admitting that God knows multiple things introduces multiplicity into God, for God knows these disparate things not as they are in themselves but as they are in God's essence.³²⁸ Avicenna and Aquinas appear to agree that God can have knowledge of things outside God simply by knowing God's essence as cause of these things. Additionally, both men agree that the proper end of God's will is God's goodness; yet in willing God's goodness, God wills God's own existence and the existence of the universe and what populates it.³²⁹ So, because Aquinas finds *both* a way for God to know one thing—God—yet in that act of knowing, know many things *and* a way for God to will one thing—God's goodness—yet in that act of willing, will the existence of many things, Aquinas believes he can account for God's direct creation of the universe without imputing multiplicity into God's nature.

When asserting that the multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively different beings exist because God both knows them and wills them (through knowing and willing God, of

³²⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 ad1.

³²⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 ad 14; Aquinas, *SCG* II.26-27.

³²⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.14.5 resp.

³²⁹ See, for example, Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.2 resp.

course), Aquinas argues that these things exist because God intends³³⁰ them to exist.³³¹ The distinction found amongst creatures stems from God's intention to communicate God's goodness to creatures. Since God's goodness cannot be represented by one creature adequately because no creature other than God is self-subsistent, infinitely powerful, simple, and eternal, God instead produces many creatures that, when taken together, reflect God's perfection better than one single creature would. In God's wisdom, God makes giraffes and platypuses, emus and jellyfish, super novae and dwarf stars, Venus fly traps and roses, all of which together reflect God's goodness better than any one of them could do alone. The totality of what is created is able to substantially reflect God's goodness.³³² Not only does God create the universe and its inhabitants directly without implying multiplicity in God's essence, but God also intentionally creates this multiplicity in order to better reflect God's goodness.

In discussing what God creates, it is evident that Aquinas's account of God's creation of the universe fits well with Aristotelian efficient causation. God precedes God's effect in some way, and God, by an exercise of God's infinite power, is able to produce the existence of new beings. Aquinas attributes God's action to God's knowledge and will rather than God's nature, although either are appropriate sources of action for an efficient cause. Creating is something that God is capable of doing, although Aquinas must explain how God is able to produce being and how such an act does not tarnish or deviate from the

³³⁰ This is not a technical term—here, Aquinas simply means “deliberately willed.”

³³¹ John Wippel has an interesting article discussing how the derivation of the many from the one can be explained in terms of a dialectic between being and not-being. In it, he explores Aquinas's comments on Boethius's *De Trinitate* about the principle of plurality being otherness. If Wippel's analysis is right, then it is possible to analyze God's production of the multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively diverse things in terms of God producing things with varying gradations of being and non-being. Wippel's analysis does not undermine the interpretive work done here, but it does offer a more fundamental explanation of the origins of multiplicity. See John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One: A Dialectic between Being and Nonbeing,” *Review of Metaphysics* 38.3 (1985): 563-590.

³³² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 resp.

orthodox Christian conception of God. The remaining issue regarding whether Aquinas's account of divine creation is an account of Aristotelian efficient causation is whether the production of being *ex nihilo* is a type of Aristotelian efficient causation. To this issue we now turn.

III. Efficient Causation without Patients

Although Aquinas did not compose an extended treatise on causation, one can glean his views on causation from discussions that occur in his works.³³³ In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle and distinguishes four types of causes: final, formal, efficient, and material.³³⁴ Since the focus of this chapter is Aquinas's account of divine causation in creating, I will focus here on efficient causation.³³⁵

A. Efficient Causation involving patients

In *On the Principles of Nature*, Aquinas describes a typical instance of generation, namely, the case of a sculptor making a bronze statue. Generation involves three things: matter, which is being in potentiality; privation, which Aquinas calls “non-being in actuality;” and form, which, by informing the matter, makes the thing actual.³³⁶ Generation can be substantial, in which some new thing is produced from existing materials, such as the production of a new human being from sperm and menstrual blood. Alternately, generation can be accidental, in which variance occurs in some substance that already exists, such as when a man moves from sitting to standing.³³⁷ In these cases of generation, the material and

³³³ Michael Rota, “Causation” in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford University Press, 2013), 104.

³³⁴ Aquinas, *ST IIaIIae* 27.3.

³³⁵ Since Aquinas asserts that God is the final cause of the universe, it would be possible to examine God's causing the universe to exist from that perspective as well. However, a discussion of God as final cause falls outside the stated scope of this project. For a cogent discussion of God's final causality as it relates to creating, see Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995).

³³⁶ Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae* (DPN) 1.

³³⁷ Aquinas, *DPN* 1.

formal causes are clearly delineated, but what is unclear is how generation is instigated.³³⁸

Aquinas notes that a lump of bronze does not make itself into a statue; instead, a sculptor is needed.³³⁹ Something is needed to act to bring this potentiality into actuality, and this thing is “called the efficient or moving cause, or the agent or the principle of motion.”³⁴⁰ The agent produces the change by actualizing some potentiality in the matter.³⁴¹ The final component of generation is that for the sake of which the agent acts, which is the end or final cause.

The efficient cause, then, is the agent—literally, the one acting. Agents can be sentient beings acting voluntarily, but non-sentient beings like plants and even fire can be agents.³⁴² So, an efficient cause is not always something that contemporary philosophers would recognize as an agent, but all of these agents share the common characteristic of acting. What distinguishes the efficient cause from the other causes is that the efficient cause acts. Aquinas states: “for an efficient cause is a cause insofar as it acts.”³⁴³

Given the importance of Aquinas’s reliance on the notion of agents while discussing efficient causes, further explication of what Aquinas means by agent—and also substance—is warranted. Agents, as noted, can be any substance which acts.³⁴⁴ A substance is distinguished from an accident in this way: an accident inheres in something else; that is, it is

³³⁸ Aquinas, *DPN* 3; Rota, “Causation,” 107.

³³⁹ Aquinas, *DPN* 3.

³⁴⁰ Aquinas, *DPN* 3.

³⁴¹ Aquinas, *In Phys* III.5.1324; Aquinas, *SCG* III.69; Aquinas, *ST* Ia.118.1; Michael Rota, “Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas,” (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 2006), 125.

³⁴² See, for example, *DPN* 4. Though Aquinas frequently talks about efficient causes in terms of natural agents and voluntary agents, he also calls the art of the sculptor an efficient cause. So, an efficient cause is not always something that contemporary philosophers would recognize as an agent, but all of these agents share the common characteristic of acting, which makes them efficient causes in Aquinas’s estimation. See Aquinas, *In Phys* II.5.182; Rota, “Causation,” 2; Rota, “Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas,” 123-124.

³⁴³ Aquinas, *In Meta* V.2.775; see also Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Truth* (QDV) 22.2 and 28.8. As Rota notes, Aquinas uses the terms ‘efficient cause’ and ‘agent cause’ synonymously (Rota, “Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas,” 124).

³⁴⁴ Aquinas, *ST* IIaIIae.26.2; Rota, “Causation,” 107.

not an independently existing being. A substance is an independently existing thing.³⁴⁵ For example, a camel is a substance, but the color of the camel is not. In a sense, the color of the camel does not exist apart from the camel—it exists *in* the camel. Whereas if the camel were shaved or had its hair dyed, the camel would still be that same camel—though it would certainly look different. Each substance belongs to a species. Each member of a species has a nature common to that species, which entails that they each have a distinctive set of properties and causal powers. A human has the causal powers that a member of the species ‘human’ has, and a camel has the causal powers that a member of the species ‘camel’ has. Fire has the causal powers that a member of the species ‘fire’ has.³⁴⁶

Agents can be sentient or non-sentient beings, which means that some agents act purely based on their nature, and others act based on their natures and volitions. Fire, then, is a natural agent because fire cannot think or deliberate. In the right circumstances, fire burns and cannot help but burn.³⁴⁷ Humans are voluntary agents because a human is capable of willing an end and acting to reach that end. If a human wills to become an airplane pilot, she can chose to do certain things—take a pilot certification course, for example—to accomplish that goal. However, voluntary agents are not able to will and achieve *any* goal, for they are always limited by their natures. A human might will to fly, but if he is a human (and not Clark Kent, who is in fact a Kryptonian), he does not have the ability to fly—unaided by any additional tools or machines, of course.

The limitations imposed by a thing’s nature are limitations on the powers and capabilities that a thing has.³⁴⁸ These limitations apply not only to what an agent can do to a

³⁴⁵ Aquinas, *DPN* 1-4.

³⁴⁶ Rota, “Causation,” 107.

³⁴⁷ Aquinas, *DPN* 1-3.

³⁴⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.36.3 ad 1; Rota, “Causation,” 108.

patient but also to what a patient can possibly become. Powers can be active or passive. Active powers are the abilities an agent has to act, and passive powers are the abilities an agent has to be acted upon.³⁴⁹ An agent's powers determine the range of actions it can possibly perform and changes it can possibly undergo.

Along with a specific nature entailing that a creature has certain powers, a nature entails that a creature has certain inclinations. An inclination is a tendency for an agent to act toward certain ends, namely those ends which are the final cause for whatever sort of being the agent is.³⁵⁰ Agents acting based on their natures have intentions, as do agents acting based on their volitions.³⁵¹ The inclinations of agents acting by nature are called natural inclinations, and the inclinations of agents acting by volition are any acts of the will.³⁵² Any agent intends to do some things more than others, and these things are what Aquinas takes to be the agent's inclinations. Inclinations are important for Aquinas's theory of efficient causation because appealing to their existence helps him explain the regularity of the types of acts performed by agents.

B. Types of Efficient Causation

With this framework in place, we can now discuss what general classifications various instances of efficient causation fall under according to Aquinas.³⁵³ The case of the sculptor making a statue above is representative of the first type of efficient causation—change or motion. It involves an agent (the sculptor), matter (bronze, which is the patient that underlies the change), a privation (a lack of Aphrodite-shaped-ness in the bronze), and a

³⁴⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.25.1; Aquinas, *In Meta* V.14.596; Rota, "Causation," 109.

³⁵⁰ Aquinas, *DPN* 3; Aquinas, *ST* Ia.IIae.1.2; Aquinas, *SCG* III.16; Rota, "Causation," 109-110.

³⁵¹ Aquinas, *DPN* 3 (Et quia, ut dicit Aristoteles in secundo Metaph., omne quod agit, non agit nisi intendendo aliquid, oportet esse aliud quartum, id scilicet quod intenditur ab operante: et hoc dicitur finis.); See also Aquinas, *ST* IIIa.16 and Aquinas, *In Phys* II.10.240; Rota, "Causation," 110.

³⁵² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.87.4; Rota, "Causation," 114.

³⁵³ Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 167-171.

form (Aphrodite's shape, which comes to inform the bronze), and an act of our agent which imparts the new form to the matter. This act cannot be contrary to the agent's nature. That is, the act does not require an act which the agent does not have the power(s) or inclination(s) to perform. Change can be substantial—resulting in a new substance—or accidental—resulting in a modification of an existing substance.³⁵⁴ The action performed by the agent and the passion undergone by the patient are the same motion in the patient, for the passion undergone by the patient simply is the action that the agent performs.

Despite Aristotle's focus on efficient causation as change, Aquinas asserts that efficient causation also includes acts of conservation. Conservation is the preservation of the existence of some existing thing. Without God conserving what God creates, all of these created things would cease to exist.³⁵⁵ God conserves being by performing an action.³⁵⁶ This action of conservation is a continuation of divine creating.³⁵⁷ In his commentary on the *Divine Names*, Aquinas says that moving (by which he means bringing about substantial or accidental changes) and conserving are types of efficient causation.³⁵⁸ Thus, efficient causation in Aquinas is not limited merely to acts of production, as is implied by the case of the sculptor as an efficient cause. So, Kretzmann's claim that Aquinas thinks of efficient causation "as a thing's (natural or artificial) production of another thing, or event, or state,"

³⁵⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3-4.

³⁵⁵ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 177.

³⁵⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1. obj 1; reply 1; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 177.

³⁵⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1 reply 1; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 177.

³⁵⁸ *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Exposito (In Div Nom)* 4.5; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 178-179.

is not correct.³⁵⁹ Efficient causation is causation by action, though the example the sculptor as efficient cause is a type of efficient causation that is productive.

Because Aquinas takes action to be the main characteristic of efficient causation and says that conservation and creation are one act of God, it may be unsurprising that the third type of efficient causation recognized by Aquinas is creating.³⁶⁰ Yet, there are significant differences between creation, conservation, and change. Change and creation involve a patient, but creation does not; change and creation involve production, but conservation does not.³⁶¹ Despite these differences, each type of efficient cause occurs because an agent acts, bringing about some effect.

C. Efficient Causation without Patients

Creating, as noted above, is an action of God which produces being out of no pre-existing material.³⁶² Because God is an agent who lacks any passive potentiality, God is a fully actualized being.³⁶³ Hence, God does not require some patient upon which to act. Instead,

³⁵⁹ Kretzmann, "The Metaphysics of Providence," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9: 2 (Fall 2000): 114. As Rota notes, from Kretzmann's comments in *The Metaphysics of Creation* where he says that Aquinas includes conservation on a list of God's transient activity, it does seem that Kretzmann at least thought at one time that conservation is an action performed by God (*The Metaphysics of Creation*, 16, 18). The disagreement I (and Rota) have with Kretzmann's interpretation of efficient causation in Aquinas seems to depend on whether *action* or *production* is the defining characteristic of efficient causation. An additional important consideration is that Aquinas lists divine conservation as efficient causation in his commentary on the *Divine Names* (4.5). While Aquinas does assert that the word 'production' "expresses the causality of the efficient cause", he does not say that production is synonymous with efficient causation (*Commentary on the Book of Causes* proposition 1; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 122). Even if production were central to efficient causation, Aquinas's claim that conservation occurs in the same act as creation suggests that *both* are types of efficient causation.

³⁶⁰ Aquinas, *In Div Nom* 4.5.

³⁶¹ Burrell notes that creation and conservation are nearly identical, except creation does not presuppose a patient. David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1993), 68.

³⁶² Aquinas, *ST Ia.45.1*; *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum (In Sent)* 2.1.1.2; *SCG II.16, 35*; *On the Power of God* 3.4.

³⁶³ Aquinas, *ST Ia.45.5*; *SCG II.16, 37*; *On the Power of God* 3.1.

God is able to bring about the whole existence of the thing.³⁶⁴ Creating is a type of efficient causation in which God's action is productive of the totality of beings other than God.³⁶⁵

Creation, then, is not change. Change must involve a patient that persists through the action performed by the agent.³⁶⁶ The patient underlying the change is different as a result of the agent's action, but it persists nonetheless. The assertion that creation is an action of God but is not change raises several important questions. First, what does Aquinas mean by the term 'action' in the context of creation? Second, how does the conception of creating as a type of efficient causation cohere with Aquinas's acceptance of Aristotle's conception of changing something as a type—or, as Aristotle presented it, as *the* type—of efficient causation?

In terms of action in change, the action performed by the agent when the agent changes a patient is straightforward: the agent actualizes some potentiality in the patient. This sort of act is characterized as motion by Aquinas.³⁶⁷ The agent's act changes the patient, and the change in the patient is termed the passion.³⁶⁸ Motion—change—links passion to action, but passion and action differ in terms of relations.³⁶⁹

In terms of action in creation, Aquinas cannot appeal to motion to explain action. Since the motion produced by the agent is what actualizes potentialities in a patient and there is no pre-existing subject in creation, motion is not a helpful concept for explaining God's

³⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.5.

³⁶⁵ Here, I disagree with Burrell's analysis of efficient causation. He states that creation is not efficient causation because efficient causation always presupposes a patient. What I am arguing here is that Aquinas did not view efficient causation as a type of causation that *always* requires a patient—it does not require a patient in the act of creating, but it does require a patient in the more common type of efficient causation, change. See David Burrell, "Aquinas's Appropriation of Liber de Causis" in *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. Fergus Kerr (London: SCM, 2003), 77.

³⁶⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.2 ad 2.

³⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.3.

³⁶⁸ Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 172.

³⁶⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.2 ad 2. Here, Aquinas refers to Aristotle's *Physics* 3.20-21.

action in creating. Aquinas explains:

in creation, by which the whole substance of a thing is produced, the same thing can be taken as different now and before only according to our way of understanding, so that some thing is understood first entirely not existing, and afterwards as existing. But as action and passion coincide in the substance of motion, and differ only according to diverse relations, it must follow that when motion is subtracted, only diverse relations remain in the Creator and in the creature.³⁷⁰

So, if motion is not a possible explanation of God's act in creating, then what remains as a possible explanation is some relation.³⁷¹ Creating, then, is a relation.³⁷² Creating is a relation between what is brought into existence and what brings it into existence.³⁷³ Creating is an act of God that results in the existence of some new being, which means that a relation of dependence exists between the new being and God.³⁷⁴

These two ways of talking about creating—as an action and as a relation—correspond to the active and passive sense, respectively, of the term creation.³⁷⁵ Taken passively, creation is a relation in the creature. Taken actively, creation is God's action. As

³⁷⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.2 ad 2. Sed in creatione, per quam producitur tota substantia rerum, non potest accipi aliquid idem aliter se habens nunc et prius, nisi secundum intellectum tantum; sicut si intelligatur aliqua res prius non fuisse totaliter, et postea esse. Sed cum actio et passio conveniant in substantia motus, et differant solum secundum habitudines diversas, ut dicitur in III Physic., oportet quod, subtracto motu, non remaneant nisi diversae habitudines in creante et creato.

³⁷¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.3.

³⁷² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.3.

³⁷³ Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 173; Acar, *Talking about God*, 201.

³⁷⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.3.

³⁷⁵ Aquinas, *In Sent* 2.1.1.2 ad 4; Rota, "Causation and Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," 174.

Aquinas says, “creation signified actively means the divine action, which is God’s essence, with a relation to the creature.”³⁷⁶

This distinction between active and passive creation helps show the similarity between efficient causation without and with a patient. In efficient causation with a patient, the effect is dependent on the cause: the change in the patient is brought about by motion, which means that the effect depends on the cause’s motion to change. In efficient causation without a patient, the effect is dependent on the cause: the production of being is brought about without motion, but the new being still depends upon God for its production. In both types of efficient causation, dependency on the agent (whether that agent’s action involves motion or not) is crucial.

D. Defense of Creation as Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Having addressed what Aquinas means by action in creating, Aquinas’s integration of creation into Aristotelian efficient causation can be addressed. Like Avicenna, Aquinas takes metaphysics to be the study of being, a study which suggests that there ought to be a type of causation that produces being. Unlike Avicenna, Aquinas does not offer extended analyses of the intricacies of efficient causation comparable to Avicenna’s. Additionally, Aquinas has access to commentaries on Aristotle’s works (including Avicenna’s commentaries), and some of the foci of those commentaries are on causation. So, like Avicenna, Aquinas presumes that Aristotle focuses on one kind of efficient causation rather than offering a plenary

³⁷⁶ *ST* Ia.45.3. ad 1. Creatio active significata significat actionem divinam, quae est eius essentia cum relatione ad creaturam. Aquinas distinguishes between real and conceptual relations. The relationship between created beings and God is a real relation, but the relation between God and created things is a conceptual relation. Real relations are relations that have a subject, a term, and a relation (a reason the subject is referred to the term) that are all real, that is, that all exist. Conceptual relations, or relations of reason, have only either a subject, a term, or a relation that is real. The other two components depend on the activity of some mind for existence. See Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 7.8-11, 8.1-4; Aquinas, *SCG* IV.14.6-13; Acar, *Talking about God* 202-210; Earl Muller, “Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas’s Understanding of God’s Relation to the World,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 675.

explanation of efficient causation. In delineating conservation and creation as types of efficient causation, Aquinas offers a more robust explanation of efficient causation that makes explicit what is implicit in Aristotle's account of efficient causation.

In support of this claim, consider Aquinas's discussion in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Aquinas says, "according to Avicenna, *Physics* 1.10 and *Metaphysics* 6.1, there are two kinds of agents. One is a natural agent, which is an agent involving motion, and the other is divine, which is the giver of being, as was said."³⁷⁷ Along with these two kinds of agents, there are "two kinds of act or effect. One is accomplished through the motion of a natural agent."³⁷⁸ The second kind of effect is the sort of effect which "receives being from the divine agent without motion."³⁷⁹ The distinction of two kinds of agents and two kinds of acts—natural, which involves motion, and divine, which does not involve motion—is presented as though this distinction coheres with Aristotle's theory of causation. Motion, i.e. change, is one type of efficient causation, but creation is another. Divine efficient causation does not involve motion because God brings about the existence of beings *ex nihilo*, and God is able to do this because God is a being who lacks any passive potency. In asserting efficient causation to be causation which occurs either by natural or divine agents, Aquinas explicitly follows Avicenna's broader interpretation of Aristotelian causes.

In addition to drawing upon Avicenna's commentary on Aristotle's causation to justify the inclusion of divine efficient causation as a type of efficient causation, Aquinas follows Avicenna in pointing out some of the shortcomings of Aristotle's account of causation that could be solved by the inclusion of divine efficient causation. One such problem is that the subject matter of metaphysics—being and causation—seems incomplete

³⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.2 ad 1, p. 75.

³⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.2 ad 1, p. 75.

³⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* 2.1.1.2 ad 1, p. 75.

without an exploration of the causes of being. Aquinas asserts that being is the primary subject of metaphysics.³⁸⁰ Along with being, causes are another important subject of metaphysical study. Aquinas says that metaphysics is a study of universal and primary causes.³⁸¹ The study of being as such does not fit into the other sciences, and while metaphysical study involves an examination of separated substances primarily, the study involves all substances insofar as they have being.³⁸² Substances originate from something, and thus there must be an investigation of those origins.³⁸³ Accordingly, the subject matter of metaphysics is indicative that there are additional causes which Aristotle did not consider, particularly the sort of cause from which being is originated. While Aristotle did seem to consider that the Unmoved Mover is, in a way, a cause of what exists (namely, by final causation), Aquinas expands his consideration to the efficient cause of being as well.³⁸⁴ Aquinas emphasizes that the Unmoved Mover is a simple, immaterial, unmoved, fully actualized being.³⁸⁵ So, Aquinas's emphasis on efficient causation being a type of causation in which an agent acts flows naturally into Aquinas talking about how this fully actualized being causes not only by final causation but also by efficient causation.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁰ Aquinas, *In Meta* VI.1.1148, 1152-1153; XII.1.2416.

³⁸¹ Aquinas, *In Meta* I.2.36; I.3.64.

³⁸² Aquinas, *In Meta* XI.1.2153.

³⁸³ Aquinas, *In Meta* XII.5.2490.

³⁸⁴ Aquinas, *In Meta* XII.7.2521.

³⁸⁵ Aquinas, *In Meta* XII.6.

³⁸⁶ Not only could Aquinas point to the subject matter of metaphysics to help justify the study of creation, but he also could have emphasized the distinction he draws between self-sufficient and dependent beings. God is a purely self-sufficient being who does not depend on anything else for God's own existence (*SCG* II.37). Aquinas argues in his famous five ways that there must be some self-sufficient being that produces what exists; otherwise, nothing would exist. From the transience of living beings, Aquinas concludes that there must be something that brings about the existence of such beings. This argument suggests that there is some being who brings about the existence of the universe (*ST* Ia.2.3). Aquinas does say elsewhere that the belief that the universe is created is a matter of faith that is neither contrary to reason nor demonstrable to reason (*On the Power of God* 3.17; *On the Eternity of the World* 3 in *St. Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, St. Bonaventure On the Eternity of the World*, trans. Cyril Vollert, Lottie Kendzierski, Paul Byrne (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1964)). Accordingly, his adherence to Christian theology gives him a reason to find Aristotle's analysis of causation to be incomplete.

The second potential problem with Aristotle's theory of causation is that in it, Aristotle does not make a distinction between causes of being and causes of becoming. Aquinas follows Avicenna in distinguishing between the causes of being and the causes of becoming.³⁸⁷ Aquinas says that there is a need for God to keep creatures in existence, which means that God preserves them.³⁸⁸ Aquinas presents two ways in which some thing can preserve another thing. An agent can preserve something accidentally by removing from it that which would destroy it. This is an indirect sort of preservation. An example would be a person removing water from an iron handle. The water would cause the iron to oxidize, which would destroy the iron. The other way an agent can preserve something *per se*, which means that "what is preserved depends on the preserver in such a way that [the preserved] cannot exist without [the preserver]."³⁸⁹ This second way most aptly describes how God preserves what is in existence. God preserves all things in this second way, even things that are directly produced by something else.

³⁸⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 5.1; Kara Richardson, "The Metaphysics of Agency: Avicenna and his Legacy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2008), 126. See also Gregory T. Doolan, "The Causality of the Divine Ideas in Relation to Natural Agents" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 399; Francis X. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St. Thomas*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940), 317f; John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (2000): 202.

³⁸⁸ This claim is unsurprising given the discussion above about conservation. Conservation simply is God keeping things in existence. One might be tempted to think that Aquinas makes a circular argument—he says that conservation is a type of efficient cause, and then he uses the notion of conservation to suggest that there is an inherent weakness in Aristotle's causal analysis. Unfortunately, that is the order in which the claims appear in this paper. However, I note two additional mitigating factors that either make Aquinas's argument non-circular or, at least, make the circularity appear less vicious. First, Aquinas follows Avicenna in making this distinction. Avicenna distinguished between true causes and apparent causes, and the true causes are the causes which bestow being on a thing. Aquinas's work mirrors that distinction here. Second, Aquinas does not write a treatise in which he presents problems with Aristotle's causal theory. This evidence I have presented that there is warrant to find room in Aristotle's theory of causation for efficient causation without patients stems from a number of Aquinas's writings in a number of places within those writings. So, to be fair, Aquinas does not present an argument that efficient causation without patients is a type of Aristotelian efficient cause. He merely posits the existence of such a type of causation and incorporates it into the existing causal system, which was Aristotle's. So, it is unfair to suggest that Aquinas argues circularly for the existence of this type of causation, for he does not, strictly speaking, argue for it at all.

³⁸⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1 (inquantum scilicet illud quod conservatur, dependet a conservante, ut sine eo esse non possit); *On the Power of God* 5.1; See also Richardson's discussion, p. 126-7.

To further his point, Aquinas distinguishes between agents that cause becoming and agents that cause being. An agent that causes becoming might not be the direct cause of being: a builder is the cause of the becoming of a house but not the being of a house, for the *being* of the house is its form and matter. “If an agent is not the cause of a form as such, neither will it be directly the cause of *being* which results from that form, but it will be the cause of the effect in its *becoming* only.”³⁹⁰ God is the cause of the being of a thing, for all beings exist insofar as they participate in the divine existence.³⁹¹ Since there is a distinction between causes of becoming—causes which appear to be efficient causes of accidental or substantial change—and causes of being—a cause which appears to be an efficient cause of existence—there must be some room in a theory of causation to discuss both causes of being and causes of becoming.³⁹² Aquinas’s account of efficient causation without a patient is an account of the cause of being. Given the close connection between creation and conservation in Christian theology, this broader conception of efficient causation will be useful for explaining God’s production and preservation of the universe. If Aristotle’s theory of efficient causation cannot account for both creation and conservation, it would likely be an unhelpful theory for explaining divine creating.

Aquinas’s conception of efficient causation is broader than what Aristotle articulates, but Aquinas, like Avicenna, would have viewed his own discussions of conservation and creation as efficient causation as development of the implications of Aristotle’s causal theories. When Aquinas asserts (following Aristotle) that there are four types of causes, Aquinas then attempts to fit creation into that paradigm. Aquinas follows Avicenna’s

³⁹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1.

³⁹¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1; *In Div Nom* 4.

³⁹² Again, see Wippel’s “Thomas Aquinas on Creatures and Causes of *Esse*” for a fuller discussion of the implications of this claim.

interpretation, echoing Avicenna's analysis of efficient causation as natural or metaphysical. However, Aquinas distinguishes efficient causation from other types of causes by focusing on action (not production). Aquinas also finds room for discussing creation as efficient causation because metaphysics is the study of being and first causes. Given the distinction Aquinas draws between causes of being and causes of becoming—a distinction not in Aristotelian theories of causation but not necessarily contrary to such theories—it is unsurprising that Aquinas ties the cause of being to creation and conservation. Aquinas adopts and further develops the implications of Aristotle's causal theory and Avicenna's articulation of some of those implications. For Aquinas, efficient causation is causation by action, either as the result of an agent's will or nature. Efficient causation could be change (involving patients), conservation, or creation. Given what Aquinas says above about God's will and creation, the act which produces created beings is a voluntary rather than natural act.

IV. Emanation as a type of Aristotelian Efficient Causation

In light of the discussion above, which reveals that Aquinas discusses God creating in terms of efficient causation and that Aquinas seems to understand efficient causation without a patient to be a type of efficient causation that is not inconsistent with Aristotelian efficient causation, it is somewhat surprising to discover that Aquinas *also* speaks of God creating in terms of emanation. Within this section, I will explore the passages in which Aquinas speaks of divine creating as an emanation. When describing creating as emanating, Aquinas uses some but not all of the features of Neoplatonic emanation identified in the first chapter. So, the next task I undertake in this section is to show what Aquinas means by emanating in the context of his discussion of creating. Because Aquinas does not adopt wholesale the Neoplatonic conception of emanation, I also discuss why Aquinas might have

averred what he did. Aquinas presenting creation as emanation (but not of a strictly Neoplatonic sort) is likely related to a distinction he wished to draw between God's generative acts of creating the world and of the procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the members of the Trinitarian God in addition to God the Father. Finally, I offer a brief discussion of how the causal theories of efficient causation and emanation are related in light of Aquinas's statements concerning divine creating. I argue that Aquinas thinks of emanation as producing an effect via efficient causation without a patient, and that the emanator acts voluntarily (rather than acting by its nature) when performing this act.

A. Explication of creation as emanation

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas opens his discussion of God creating by discussing “the mode of the emanation of things from the First Principle, which is called creation.”³⁹³ Specifically, creation is the “emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God.”³⁹⁴ According to his analysis in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the emanation of all beings from God must be an emanation that does not rely on any patients, for if there were some pre-existing thing(s), then God's procession would not be the source of all beings.³⁹⁵ Aquinas's discussion of God's creation of beings distinct from God in his *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* is also peppered with references to emanation and production, and both terms are used synonymously with the term ‘creation’.³⁹⁶ Aquinas consistently defines the term ‘creation’ to mean the emanation by God of beings other than God.³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45 preamble: “de modo emanationis rerum a primo principio, qui dicitur creatio.”

³⁹⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.1 resp: “emanationem totius entis a causa universali, quae est Deus.”

³⁹⁵ Aquinas, *SCG* II.30. Earlier, Aquinas has argued that God is and must be the source of all beings. See *SCG* II.15.

³⁹⁶ See, for example, Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.4, 13, 15, and 16.

³⁹⁷ As noted above, when Aquinas offers details regarding divine creating, he does so in terms of efficient causation, and Aquinas seems to believe that efficient causation without patients is a type of efficient causation that coheres to Aristotle's notion of efficient causation.

Aquinas's commentary on the *Book of Causes* is an important source for his articulation of creation as emanation. His commentary on the *Book of Causes*, composed in 1272, was one of his final philosophical works, so in it, he offers his mature opinions. Aquinas asserts that the First Cause, which is the emanative source of other existing beings, is a being which is pure act.³⁹⁸ Aquinas further specifies what he means when he says that the First Cause, who is God, emanates. Aquinas endorses Pseudo-Dionysius's³⁹⁹ distinction between God, first beings, and second beings, etc.⁴⁰⁰ There is a difference, he says, between first beings, which are intelligent substances, and second beings, which are corporeal things.⁴⁰¹ Aquinas also adopts Pseudo-Dionysius's claim that some things are immediately emanated by God, and these substances emanate other things themselves; however, he interprets this claim to mean that God produces things "in their essence" and these substances receive "superadded perfections" from the Intelligences.⁴⁰² The distinction drawn between first and second beings is not a distinction between what is emanated first and then emanated second. Instead, it is a distinction between intelligent beings (like the angels) and sensible beings (like material beings).⁴⁰³ Additionally, when Aquinas asserts that creation is mediated, he explains that between first and second beings, that is, angels and material beings, are celestial bodies. Thus, celestial bodies mediate first and second beings.⁴⁰⁴ Finally,

³⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent Guagliardo, Charles Hess, and Richard Taylor (Washington: CUA, 1996), proposition 6, p. 49.

³⁹⁹ Aquinas's commentary is replete with comparisons to Proclus's works. It seems safe to assume that Aquinas at least suspected that the author of the commentary was not Dionysius. See the Introduction in *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent Guagliardo, Charles Hess, and Richard Taylor.

⁴⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 7, p. 54-55; proposition 16, p. 107.

⁴⁰¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 7, p. 54-55.

⁴⁰² Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 9, p. 69-70.

⁴⁰³ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 16, p. 107.

⁴⁰⁴ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 16, p. 108.

Aquinas asserts that God creates all things “with one infusion,” and this infusion is “nevertheless received differently in different things.”⁴⁰⁵

From this review of Aquinas’s comments on what, specifically, is meant by defining creation as the emanation by God of beings other than God, it is clear that Aquinas interprets much of emanation differently than the Neoplatonic approach to understanding emanation. By defining creation in terms of a particular type of emanation—one in which God produces beings other than God—Aquinas may or may not be embracing Neoplatonic emanation. What is yet unclear is to what extent Aquinas’s account deviates from Neoplatonic emanation. As of yet, Aquinas has shown a tendency to retain the language of Neoplatonic emanation—creation, first beings, second beings, mediation—but interpret that language in a radically different manner than a Neoplatonist might. So, I will move to a careful exploration and comparison of Aquinas’s use of this language to see in what ways Aquinas’s account of creation as emanation deviates from creation as Neoplatonic emanation.

B. Creative Emanation is not Neoplatonic Emanation

Aquinas and Avicenna have a different understanding of what it means for God to create by emanating. Avicenna presents an account of divine creation via emanation in which God, as a simple being, can emanate one simple being, namely the First Intellect. This first created being is the origin of beings which are numerically and qualitatively diverse: it considers itself insofar as it is unlike God, and it emanates a celestial sphere; it considers itself insofar as it is like God, and it emanates a separate intellect, the Second Intellect. The

⁴⁰⁵ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 20, p. 122 Dicit ergo primo quod omnes bonitates quae inveniuntur in rebus, effluunt a causa prima; et huiusmodi bonitates recipit unaquaeque res secundum modum et proprietatem suae substantiae et virtutis - sunt autem diversarum rerum diversae naturae et virtutes - et inde est quod, quamvis causa prima influat uno influxu super omnia, diversimode tamen influxus eius in diversis rebus recipitur.).

Second Intellect goes through a similar process, as does the Third Intellect, the Fourth, and so on, each producing a heavenly sphere and another intellect. The Tenth Intellect is the final intellect, and it produces the terrestrial realm. Most obviously, Avicenna's account of divine emanation includes the dual assertions that (a) God emanates, and this emanation is the production of being(s) other than God and (b) before God emanates, no beings other than God exist. One key aspect of Avicenna's account of creation by emanation is that one simple being can produce one simple being. Avicenna's account includes intermediaries, and those intermediaries are essential for explaining how numerically and qualitatively diverse beings exist. Additionally, Avicenna argues that God emanates the First Intellect as the result of an act of will, and thus the emanation is voluntary and not the result of natural necessity.⁴⁰⁶ If Aquinas also asserts that God can emanate one simple being, that the qualitative and quantitative diversity of existing things is due to the work of intermediaries, and that God emanates as the result of an act of will, then Aquinas has presented an account of divine emanation that aligns with Avicenna's Neoplatonic account.

1. Productive Emanation *ex nihilo*

In Aquinas's discussion of God's emanation of the cosmos, Aquinas affirms the first two components of Avicenna's notion of emanation. God's emanation is productive of being, and God produces these beings out of nothing pre-existing.⁴⁰⁷ Aquinas asserts that, by emanating, God produces not only being *qua* being, but also that God produces *all* beings. This emanation of all being from God is an act that does not presuppose the existence of any being (other than God) before this emanation. That is, God's emanation proceeds from

⁴⁰⁶ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI; IX for more detail.

⁴⁰⁷ See, for example, Aquinas, *SCG* II.2; Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1992), 240.

God, but this action does not require anything other than God—no preexisting patient, for example—to occur.⁴⁰⁸ God emanates, producing being(s) that did not previously exist.

2. From one simple being, multiple beings are produced

Aquinas expressly rejects the principle that from one being, only one simple being can be produced in the context of creating.⁴⁰⁹ In response to the claim that conformity between effect and cause requires that only one simple being be produced by one simple being, Aquinas responds that conformity may simply mean likeness. There is *some* likeness between creatures and God, but this fact does not mean that there is, in Aquinas's terms, equality between creatures and God.⁴¹⁰ The fact that God is a simple, unified being does not mean that creatures must also have those qualities. Aquinas seems to be denying that God's nature as a simple, unified being limits God's creative emanation to one creature that, like

⁴⁰⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.1 resp. Avicenna similarly claims that God does not use any pre-existing matter (or beings) to emanate the First Intellect; however, he rejected the notion that God created *ex nihilo* because he took *ex nihilo* production to imply that there was a time when God existed but the universe did not. Avicenna objected to this notion for two reasons. First, before the production of the universe, there would have been no time—time cannot exist without motion, and motion cannot exist without material beings. If God were the only being in existence, there would be no matter, no motion, and no time. Second, Avicenna asserts that the universe is sempiternal. As long as God exists, God's effect exists. Since God always exists (because God is a necessary being and cannot fail to exist), the universe also always exists (as something which is necessary through another—that is, it is (theoretically) possible for the universe not to exist, but because God wills the universe to exist, it must exist). See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI, IX.

⁴⁰⁹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15. resp; see also Wayne Hankey's comments in "*Ab Uno Simplici non est Nisi Unum*: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Reverend Doctor Robert D. Crouse*, eds. Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam (New York: Brill, 2007), 309-333, especially 317.

⁴¹⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16 obj 7; ad 7.

God, is simple and unified.⁴¹¹ Aquinas substantially loosens the requirement that an effect be like its cause when he asserts that material objects can be similar to their simple, immaterial creator.

An entirely simple agent is bound to emanate one and only one thing, Aquinas says, when that agent acts by its nature and produces some effect equal to itself.⁴¹² This statement, mentioned above, raises an interesting question, namely, whether it ever occurs that a simple agent is bound to emanate one and only one thing. In order to answer this question, Aquinas's doctrine of the Trinity, particularly the doctrine of the procession of the members of the Trinity, is required.

a. Excursus on Emanation in the Trinity

Aquinas holds the orthodox Christian belief that God is a simple, immaterial, eternal, changeless, unified being who is three persons, all of whom share the same substance. To understand the Trinity in such a way that one thinks that three independent gods exist is incorrect; yet, it is equally incorrect to assert that only one of these stated divine

⁴¹¹ Perhaps this denial is unsurprising in light of some of the philosophical difficulties associated with Avicenna's claim that the First Intellect is a simple being. Avicenna asserts that God produces the First Intellect, which is simple and unified like God. However, as can easily be deduced from McGinnis's discussion of Avicenna's creation account, it is puzzling that Avicenna makes the claim that the First Intellect is simple: Avicenna himself claims that the First Intellect is a being that has a dual ontological status—it is possible in itself but necessary through another. Avicenna claims that this dual ontological status is the source of numerically and qualitatively different beings in the universe. McGinnis seems to suggest that Avicenna *cannot* mean that the First Intellect is simple because Avicenna acknowledges that the First Intellect is both necessary through another but possible in itself. In response to the suggestion that Avicenna does not, in reality, hold to the belief that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced, I would argue that McGinnis does not place enough emphasis on Avicenna's claim that, for God's part, God creates a being that is simple. The duality in the First Intellect arises from the fact that the First Intellect is a created being—and thus, it cannot be necessary in itself. In my estimation, Avicenna argues that God produces the First Intellect, which is a simple being; yet, at the moment of production, it necessarily takes on this dual ontological status. The dual ontological status does not stem from God's productive effort; instead, it is a byproduct of the fact that the First Intellect is created. Whether this defense is satisfying is certainly up for debate. But, given the tensions surrounding Avicenna's claim that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced (that one might find in Ghazali's critiques or Averroës's response to those critiques), it might be unsurprising that Aquinas would abandon this model purely for the sake of philosophical ease. That this is the only reason he might do so is not what I believe.

⁴¹² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 ad 1.

persons—God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit—is god.⁴¹³ As one might expect, much ink has been spilled in an attempt to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. Of particular concern for Christians, historically speaking, has been the difficulty which arises from asserting that these three persons share one substance.⁴¹⁴ In the context of this study, the important concern is how there come to be three divine persons which are composed of the same substance.

To address the issue of how three persons share one substance, Aquinas speaks of the first person of the Trinity, God the Father, generating the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. The third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, is spirated by God the Father and God the Son.⁴¹⁵ Aquinas speaks of the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit in terms of emanation.⁴¹⁶ Aquinas says that the procession of the second and third persons of the Trinity can be understood “according to an intelligible emanation, namely, of the intelligible word [emanating] by speaking, which remains in the person.”⁴¹⁷ The emanation of the Son and the Holy Spirit is not an *outward* emanation; instead, it is an emanation which produces something within God.

The internal emanation of God the Son can be called generation of a certain sort.⁴¹⁸

Aquinas distinguishes two types of generation. The first type of generation is common to

⁴¹³ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27, 32-43.

⁴¹⁴ This issue has been of concern for Christians since before the doctrine of the Trinity was expressed in creedal form in the fourth century. Some notable and highly influential philosophers and theologians who have attempted to articulate this doctrine clearly include Augustine and Boethius (and, obviously, Aquinas).

⁴¹⁵ Aquinas ascribes to the Roman Catholic doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. This position, called *filioque* after the term inserted into the Nicene creed in the eleventh century, is not universally held among Christians. Aquinas, however, speaks of the procession of the Holy Spirit in terms of a procession from *both* the Father and the Son. See Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

⁴¹⁶ Aquinas, *SCG* IV.11; Hankey, 329.

⁴¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.1 resp: sed secundum emanationem intelligibilem, utpote verbi intelligibilis a dicente, quod manet in ipso.

⁴¹⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.1 resp.

everything that is subject to generation and corruption, and the term applies to a change from non-existence to existence. The second type of generation is common to all living things, and the term applies to the origin of a living being from another living being. The former type of generation does not apply to the emanation of the second and third persons of the Trinity, but the second does. Aquinas makes a further distinction, asserting that some things to which the second type of generation applies are also things which are begotten. When something is begotten, it is generated “by way of similitude.”⁴¹⁹ A dog begets puppies, but a dog does not beget its fur. The thing begotten must be the same sort of thing as that which begets it. That is, something which is begotten has the same nature as the thing which begets it. Because the members of the Trinity share the same nature—which means that each member of the Trinity is a being that lacks passive potency—the second and third member of the Trinity are generated insofar as they are living beings. The second member of the Trinity, the Son, is said to have been begotten because the Son and the Father share the same nature. The generation of the Son occurs via the intelligible emanation discussed above.⁴²⁰ The procession of love between the Father and the Son is the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.⁴²¹ This procession is best called spiration, however, and not generation.⁴²² There are, then, two emanations within the Godhead: the begetting of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit.⁴²³

These intellectual emanations “cannot but be.”⁴²⁴ These emanations are necessary, for it is necessary that God has self-knowledge. God’s self-knowledge necessarily results in

⁴¹⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.2 resp (rationem similitudinis).

⁴²⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.2 resp.

⁴²¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.3 resp.

⁴²² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.4 resp.

⁴²³ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.27.3.

⁴²⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 2.4 resp.; Aquinas, *ST* Ia.41.2. ad 5.

the emanation of the Son by the Father, and the self-knowledge of the Father and the Son necessarily results in their emanating the Holy Spirit.⁴²⁵ God, being God, cannot fail to exist in three persons.⁴²⁶

Aquinas asserts that God the Father emanates God the Son because of the nature of God. God the Father does not emanate the Son because the Father wills it; instead, the Father emanates the Son because it is the Father's nature to emanate the Son. According to Aquinas, when an agent emanates by nature, the agent's emanation is determined to one effect.⁴²⁷ God's will, of course, is not *contrary* to the emanation of the Son. As Aquinas states, something can be understood to be made by will either because (a) the thing willed is concomitant⁴²⁸ with the one who wills or (b) the thing willed is produced by expressed action upon the agent willing it. An example of (a) would be me willing myself to be human. I am not a human as the *result* of my will to be human; I am human and that I will to be human.

⁴²⁵ Aquinas, *In Sent* I.6.1.1; *ST* Ia.41.2; Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 2.4 and 10.2 ad 5; Hankey, 329.

⁴²⁶ In Aquinas's answer to the question, "Can a multitude of things proceed from one first thing," in *On the Power of God* 3.16, Aquinas says that if the first thing's effective power "is not determined to one effect save to that which were equal to him, and this cannot be sufficient to any effect" (Nam cum eius activa potentia sit infinita, non terminatur ad unum nisi ad id quod esset aequale sibi, quod nulli effectui competere potest.). Here, Aquinas is discussing what is possible in the context of an emanation *outside* of the Godhead. When he discusses the procession of the divine persons in the tenth question of *On the Power of God*, Aquinas asserts that the emanation of the Son and the Holy Spirit occur because God is an intelligent and living being (10.1). God, as an intelligent and living being, cannot but emanate the Son and the Holy Spirit. I would say that Aquinas distinguishes between emanations within the Godhead and outside the Godhead, and although the internal emanations are natural and necessary, they are not subject to the claim Aquinas makes earlier about the first thing's effective power not be sufficient to any effect. God cannot produce something equal to God *outside* of God for two reasons, which are consistent with Aquinas's philosophy but neither of which are offered by Aquinas in his reply to *On the Power of God* 3.16. First, this second being would be created, and thus it would not be entirely self-sufficient. A being which is entirely self-sufficient is not equal to God (since God is entirely self-sufficient). Second, (if we set aside the first reason) the existence of this second being would mean that there are two Gods. According to Aquinas (who follows Maimonides and Avicenna on this point), there can be only one God (*ST* Ia.11.3). In one sense, the emanations within the Godhead are equal to God: the persons of the Trinity share the same nature. However, it is clear that Aquinas's statement about God's inability to produce something equal to God is directed at an external emanation rather than an internal emanation.

⁴²⁷ *On the Power of God* 2.4 resp; 10.2 ad 4; *ST* Ia.41.2 resp; This statement is somewhat puzzling, for Aquinas asserts that there are two emanations within the Godhead. Despite the difficulties this statement might present, it is clear that Aquinas believes that the procession of the second and third persons of the Trinity is a necessary emanation based on the nature of God. I discuss the difficulties associated with this statement below.

⁴²⁸ Aquinas does not use the term 'concomitant' in a technical sense (like Avicenna's use of concomitant discussed in chapter two) here.

An example of (b) would be a worker willing to produce a home: the home exists as the result of the worker acting upon the volition to produce it.⁴²⁹ According to Aquinas, when one wills in the manner of (a), one can be said to be acting by nature and not will. It is my nature to be human, so if I will my nature, my will is not a causal factor in me having that nature. When Aquinas says that God the Father begets Son by will, Aquinas means that God the Father “is God by will, because He wills to be God, and wills to beget the Son.”⁴³⁰ God the Father does *not* will to beget the Son in the manner of (b), and thus (for clarity’s sake) it is said that God the Father begets the Son by nature and not by will. The necessary emanations within the Godhead, however, are preconditions of the creative emanation.⁴³¹

b. Trinitarian consideration of whether from one simple being, one simple being is produced

Here, it seems that Aquinas has contradicted himself. Aquinas clearly states that there are two processions within the Godhead, and yet by asserting that these processions occur by God’s nature, Aquinas is saying that there should be one effect of God’s emanation. Wayne Hankey, in discussing the emanations within the Godhead, suggests that the claim that God the Father emanates the Son by nature entails that Aquinas embraces Avicenna’s principle that from one simple being, only one simple being can be emanated.⁴³² Hankey asserts that by specifying that God the Father emanates the Son (and both emanate the Holy Spirit) necessarily and by nature, Aquinas is endorsing the notion that one simple being produces one effect.⁴³³ Hankey’s comments unfortunately overlook the fact that

⁴²⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.41.2 resp.

⁴³⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.41.2 resp.

⁴³¹ Hankey, 329-330; G. Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice: Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1995), 280.

⁴³² Hankey, 329.

⁴³³ Hankey, 331.

Aquinas asserts that there are two productive emanations within the Godhead, and thus the Father is responsible (at least partly) for two effects. The claim that Aquinas endorses Avicenna's principle that one simple being can emanate one simple being must at least account for the double emanation within the Godhead, and Hankey offers no such analysis.

If one were to take seriously the claim that Aquinas means to endorse the claim that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced, one would have to assert that when Aquinas says that an agent whose action is determined by nature is determined to one effect, Aquinas means that the agent whose action is determined by nature is determined not to one *single* effect but to one *type* of effect. This, of course, is a plausible interpretation of that claim. When Aquinas gives examples of agents acting by their natures, Aquinas references agents reproducing.⁴³⁴ Reproduction is done according to kind: humpback whales birth humpback whales, and oak trees produce acorns (which grow into oak trees). A whale can produce more than one calf, and an oak can produce more than one acorn; however, neither could produce something other than a member of their own natural kind. Thus, it seems possible that Hankey might have been able to argue that because the Son and the Holy Spirit share the nature of the Father, the two emanations which produce them are productive of one type of effect.

However, if one were to take seriously Hankey's claim that Aquinas means to endorse the notion that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced, one would have to reinterpret what it means to be 'one simple being.' Aquinas (and any orthodox Christian) clearly asserts that the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. That is, while the members of the Trinity share the same substance, they are not the same person. The

⁴³⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.2.

members of the Trinity are distinguished by the relations among those members: the Father begets the Son, and the Father and Son spirate the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁵ Despite the existence of the three persons, Aquinas (and orthodox Christian teaching) asserts that there exists one God. So, Hankey's claim raises interesting and problematic interpretational questions. Is it true that in these two emanations, more than 'one simple being' is produced? Additionally, is it true that because there is one God in three persons, no matter the number of emanations, there cannot be more than 'one simple being' produced? Ultimately, these answer to these questions hinge on the distinction between what it means to produce a being versus what it means to produce a person. In the case of the production of the members of the Trinity, this distinction is essential for determining whether Aquinas does adopt Avicenna's principle that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced. This fact, coupled with Aquinas's expressed aversion to the principle in every other context in which he introduces it, suggests that Hankey's assertion that Aquinas adopts the principle is hasty at best. There is no clear, concrete evidence that Aquinas intends to assert that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced even though he asserts that a thing's nature is determined to

⁴³⁵ As noted above, Aquinas distinguishes between real and conceptual relations. God has a conceptual relation to created beings, but created things have a real relation to God. Real relations need not be symmetrical between the subject and the term. Real relations could be grounded on quantity or on action and passion (Aquinas, *De Pot Dei* VII.9; Muller, 676). For God, the only possible real relations are action and passion (given that God is incorporeal). A real relation is the relationship between God the Father and God the Son (Aquinas, *ST* Ia.28.1, 3). Thus, the emanations within the Godhead produce real relations because the members of the Godhead have the same nature (Aquinas, *ST* Ia.28.1. ad 3). God's creative emanation, however, does not produce a real relation between God and creation (Aquinas, *ST* Ia.28.1. ad 3). According to Aquinas, God as creator is outside the order of creation. Furthermore, God creates not out of the necessity of nature but by God's will. Therefore, there is nothing in God that can be a subject, a term, or a reason the subject is referred to the term (Aquinas, *ST* Ia.28.1. ad 3). God has a merely conceptual relation—not a real relation—to creation. Creatures, however, have a real relation to God. If the creative emanation were necessary (like the emanations within the Godhead), then there might be a ground for a real relation between God and creation. As it stands, creatures are dependent on God, and God is independent of creatures. If God were somehow dependent on creatures or else *had* to bring about the existence of creatures due to some necessity, then there could potentially be a real relation between God and creatures.

one effect. To conflate those two assertions is incorrect. It is, therefore, my contention that Aquinas does not assert the former, though he does assert the later.

According to Aquinas, then, God does emanate something by nature. The emanations internal to the Trinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit are natural, necessary emanations. God, being God, cannot fail to exist in three persons. Even when such an emanation is natural and necessary, it is not the case that Aquinas asserts that an entirely simple agent is bound to produce one simple being. Instead, Aquinas asserts the weaker claim that an agent acting by its nature is bound to produce one effect, and this effect will be equal to it. The agent will produce something of its own natural kind, and being of the same natural kind, the agent and its effect will be equals. Aquinas does not expressly endorse Avicenna's principle that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced, and there are strong theological reasons to suggest that he would not endorse that principle.

Returning to the discussion of whether Aquinas asserts that from one simple being, one simple being can be produced within the context of creation, it must be noted that the creative emanation, unlike the emanation within the Godhead, occurs because God wills it.⁴³⁶ As noted above, an agent that emanates by its nature is limited to one type of effect. An agent that emanates by its will and/or intellect, however, is not limited to one type of effect.⁴³⁷ According to Aquinas, God's external emanations occur as a result of God's intellect and will.⁴³⁸ God's power is not determined to one effect, Aquinas says, because

⁴³⁶ See, for example, Aquinas, *In Div Nuum* 4.1 and *In De Caelo* I.7.66; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 102-103.

⁴³⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 and 2; Aquinas, *SCG* II.22, 26, 27; Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16.

⁴³⁸ Aquinas, *SCG* II.22.

neither God's intellect nor God's will are determined to one effect.⁴³⁹ Accordingly, God can produce whatever God knows and whatever God wills.

As noted above, Aquinas asserts that God is a simple being, meaning that God's essence is identical to God's intellect and will. Because God's power is infinite, God has the power to perform any act that is not logically contradictory for God to perform; however, God does not perform any act of which God does not have knowledge or that God does not will to do.⁴⁴⁰ Aquinas asserts that because God's power is infinite and God is a simple being, God's intellect is infinite as well.⁴⁴¹ Accordingly, God knows infinitely many things.⁴⁴² Aquinas believes that he can make the dual (and seemingly contradictory claims) that God is simple and that God knows infinite things because the primary object of God's intellect is God's essence. Because God is simple, God's intellect lacks potency; because God is changeless, God's intellect performs one operation.⁴⁴³ With this one operation, God's intellect fully and completely apprehends God's essence, which, for Aquinas, means that God has perfect self-knowledge. God apprehends God's essence, but knowing God's essence means knowing both perfection and infinite things.

When Aquinas says that God has self-knowledge and thus knows perfection, Aquinas means that God has self-knowledge of God as an exemplar to other beings. Knowing God's perfection entails knowing other things because no one thing can perfectly reflect God. However, an infinite number of imperfect things can reflect God. Accordingly,

⁴³⁹ Aquinas, *SCG* II.26.

⁴⁴⁰ Aquinas, *SCG* II.22; II.26.

⁴⁴¹ Aquinas, *SCG* II.26.

⁴⁴² Aquinas, *SCG* I.69.

⁴⁴³ Aquinas, *SCG* I.48. I use temporal language here to emphasize the point that God's knowledge cannot change. I do not intend to make any assertions whatsoever about the relation of time to God's existence.

God has knowledge of these things which could reflect God's own perfection.⁴⁴⁴ So, God knows other beings insofar as there is a relationship of likeness between those other beings and God. The "divine essence is the likeness of all things."⁴⁴⁵ By having this self-knowledge, God has knowledge of the one essence that all other beings are like; thus, God knows all other beings as well.⁴⁴⁶

The likeness between other beings and God can, of course, be explained by God having created those beings. God is the cause of all other things, as was discussed above. God's self-knowledge, then, involves God's knowledge of the things God causes. Because God is the cause of everything that exists, these things preexist in God's intellect.⁴⁴⁷ God knows not only existing beings—that is, beings which exist in actuality—but God also knows things which exist in potency.⁴⁴⁸ So, in apprehending the divine essence, God necessarily apprehends all of the things which God will or might create. God's knowledge, then, does not limit God to producing one simple being.

Knowledge of the things God will or might create must be coupled with the will to create those things in order for God to create them. If God's will does not limit God to producing one simple being, then there is no reason to think that God cannot produce a multiplicity. The will is moved by what the intellect apprehends as a good; in the case of God's will, God's will is moved by the intellectual apprehension of God's essence.⁴⁴⁹ God's goodness—and, by divine simplicity, God—is the end of God's will. However, this entails that God wills things other than God as well. Since every acting agent produces something

⁴⁴⁴ Aquinas, *SCG* I.69.

⁴⁴⁵ Aquinas, *SCG* I.53.

⁴⁴⁶ Aquinas, *SCG* I.53.

⁴⁴⁷ Aquinas, *SCG* I.49; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 104.

⁴⁴⁸ Aquinas, *SCG* I.69; Aristotle, *Physics* III.6 206b 12.

⁴⁴⁹ Aquinas, *SCG* II.24.

similar to it, the will of the agent “communicate[s] as far as possible to others the good possessed” by the will.⁴⁵⁰ God, who is perfect, communicates God’s perfection to other things to varying degrees.⁴⁵¹ By willing God, God wills God’s own existence and the existence of other things insofar as they are ordered toward God as an end.⁴⁵²

An appeal to neither God’s essence, power, knowledge, nor will can be used to justify the claim that God can produce one simple being. It is possible for God to will and produce a plurality of effects.⁴⁵³ The distinction Aquinas draws between production by nature and production by art further illustrates how God can produce multiple beings. An agent acting through its nature produces another thing of the same kind as itself. A dog producing puppies is an agent acting through its nature. An agent acting by art produces another thing somewhat similar to itself, but it produces something that is not the same kind of being as itself. A sculptor producing a sculpture acts by art and not nature. God acts by art in creating insofar as God makes what is in God’s mind; however, God creates by God’s nature insofar as God exercises God’s creative action in virtue of God’s nature rather than some other tool.⁴⁵⁴

3. Direct Creation

Despite the assertion that God is able to produce more than one being because God creates due to God’s will rather than God’s nature, it is still conceivable that Aquinas might intend to say that God directly creates some things but mediates the creation of others. Aquinas does specify that God creates all things in one emanation, and this emanation is

⁴⁵⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.2.

⁴⁵¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.2; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 105-6.

⁴⁵² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.2; te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 107.

⁴⁵³ te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 103.

⁴⁵⁴ te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 103.

received differently by different things.⁴⁵⁵ God creating is one action, although this one action produces multiple effects.⁴⁵⁶ God produces things in a manner similar to the sun sustaining life: through one act, the emanation of heat, the sun sustains the lives of plants and animals on Earth. The effects of this one action are multiplied.⁴⁵⁷

In addition to asserting that God creates many things in one action, Aquinas denies that God creates with the use of intermediaries. As noted above, Aquinas denies that angels create anything. Because they are not fully actualized beings, they cannot possibly create.⁴⁵⁸ In his commentary on the *Book of Causes*, Aquinas consistently re-interprets Pseudo-Dionysius's comments about mediated creation. When Pseudo-Dionysius writes that the first cause produces some effects and second causes produce others, Aquinas interprets this as God creating things "in their essence" and the angels giving "superadded perfections" to these other beings.⁴⁵⁹ Aquinas's interpretation of the mediated creation between first and second beings mentioned in Proposition 16 of the *Book of Causes* strongly suggests that Aquinas does not endorse Avicenna's concept of mediated creation. There, Aquinas says that creation is mediated; however, he means that the intellects, the first beings, are separated from the sensible beings, which are the second beings, by the celestial bodies. He utterly rejects Neoplatonic mediated emanation, instead saying that there is something in between angels and sensible beings.⁴⁶⁰ God emanates creatures directly in one act.

⁴⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 20, p. 122.

⁴⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 20, p. 122; Booth, Edward. *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers* (New York: Cambridge, 1983), 239.

⁴⁵⁷ Aquinas, *In Div Nom* 4; O'Rourke, 257; Booth, 239.

⁴⁵⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.63.3.

⁴⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 9, p. 69-70.

⁴⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, proposition 16, p. 108.

4. Voluntary, Free Creation

The Neoplatonic account of emanation is typically understood to entail that emanation is necessary rather than voluntary. Avicenna asserts that emanation can be voluntary, yet God cannot fail to will to emanate. Aquinas, as should be clear from the discussion above, agrees that God's creative emanation is a voluntary act. This agreement is interesting in light of the Neoplatonic sources with which Aquinas was familiar. As Taylor emphasizes, the *Liber de Causis* is a Neoplatonic text that does not include references to God's will *at all* in the context of creating.⁴⁶¹ In Aquinas's commentary, he largely follows the *Liber de Causis* in refraining from discussing God's will in creating, but he does make two interesting (repeated) appeals: first, he appeals to God's knowledge, which, as was discussed, Aquinas takes to be identical to God's will;⁴⁶² second, he appeals to God as a *causa agente*—an efficient cause—when God emanates.⁴⁶³ When discussing the possibility of the sempiternity of the universe, Aquinas likens God's ability to produce an effect in time to a human's ability to will to defer an action, which suggests that Aquinas would not deny a role for God's will in emanating.⁴⁶⁴ Aquinas then asserts that when such an effect occurs (and precisely what such an effect is) depends upon the will of the one producing it.⁴⁶⁵ These appeals suggest that Aquinas would not deny that God wills to emanate. God does not emanate the universe and its inhabitants based on God's nature; instead, God wills to emanate these things (and emanates them directly). While it seems clear that Aquinas believes that God wills God's emanation, it is unclear whether this emanation is willed *freely*.

⁴⁶¹ Taylor, "Primary Causation," 128.

⁴⁶² Aquinas, *ST* Ia.4.3-4, 7.

⁴⁶³ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 26 commentary, p. 144.

⁴⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 11 commentary, p. 85.

⁴⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 11 commentary, p. 85-86.

If God's creative emanation is the result of God's free will, then there is nothing external or internal to God that would necessitate this act of will. As Acar notes, Aquinas does not spend much time discussing whether any external constraints upon God's will would necessitate God's will; instead, he seems to (a) assume that an external constraint would necessitate God's will and (b) reject that any such external constraint is possible.⁴⁶⁶ Instead, Aquinas discusses potential internal constraints, namely whether God's justice requires the production of beings, and whether God's goodness requires the production of beings.

Aquinas argues that God does not produce the world as a result of a debt of justice. He offers several arguments for this conclusion. Primarily, Aquinas uses Aristotle's definition of justice as something rendering what is due to something else. Since God creates out of nothing, there exists nothing presupposed to which something could be due.⁴⁶⁷

Additionally, he argues that when something owes another thing, that first thing depends on the second thing. God, however, does not depend on anything.⁴⁶⁸ Aquinas also notes that God does not "stand in need of anything" that God might receive from something else. Presumably, what Aquinas considers when he denies that God could stand in need of something is a scenario in which preexisting matter or beings are posited. Even if there were things that existed before creation (something which is, admittedly, impossible by the definition of creation), God could never be in debt to those things. God is a self-

⁴⁶⁶ See, for example, his discussion of necessity and contingency in *On the Power of God* 3.15 obj 11 and ad 11. God, as an absolutely necessary being, is not dependent (and thus not constrained) by anything outside of God. Acar, *Talking about God*, 156.

⁴⁶⁷ In a similar argument, Aquinas notes that justice can also be understood as rendering to something that which is its own. Using similar logic, he notes that because creation is *ex nihilo*, there is nothing preexisting to which something can be rendered. (Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.28 & 29).

⁴⁶⁸ Aquinas notes that he has defended this claim in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.13, 28, 40, and 102. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.28, for example, Aquinas argues that God is a perfect (that is, complete) being. As a perfect being, there is nothing that could be added to God to complete God more fully.

sufficient being that does not depend upon the existence of anything else.⁴⁶⁹ Neither does God benefit from the existence of anything else.⁴⁷⁰ Accordingly, God does not have a debt of justice, which means that God does not create because of a debt of justice.⁴⁷¹ Therefore, God being just does not entail that God must create.⁴⁷²

Aquinas immediately transitions from discussing God's justice to God's goodness. Although Aquinas argues that God's justice does not require that God create, perhaps God's goodness does require that God create. Aquinas considers whether God being good means that something is due to God by creation. When considering God's goodness absolutely, God being good does not require God to create. Aquinas explores two ways in which goodness might necessitate action on God's part. If God were to somehow be indebted to something as a beneficent is indebted to a benefactor, then God would need to repay this debt. But, as noted above, God is self-sufficient and cannot be indebted to anything. Alternately, a thing could be owed something according to itself, which occurs when a thing

⁴⁶⁹ See, for example, Aquinas's comments in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81 that creatures do not contribute to God.

⁴⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81. As Wippel notes, God does not *gain* any perfection by creating: God may create other beings which manifest God's goodness, but God's goodness is complete regardless of God's action of creation. See John F. Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and Freedom to Create to God," *Religious Studies* 39.3 (2003), 297-298.

⁴⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.28 & 29.

⁴⁷² There are three circumstances in which it can be conceived that God would owe a debt of justice in creating. First, if God conceives of the universe in such a way that parts of the universe depend on other parts, God ought to produce *all* of those parts. For example, if God conceives of the universe having the sun, and if life depends upon the sun, then God ought to produce the sun with the universe. Second, if God conceives of creatures that are dependent upon something to exist, God ought to create that upon which they depend. So, if animals and plants require an earth upon which to live, God ought to create the earth. Third, if God conceives of creatures that have certain properties, accidents, or component parts, God ought to create those elements. If humans are hylomorphic compounds of a soul and a body, God ought to create souls and bodies such that they can compose a whole human. None of these instances of indebtedness, though, are *absolute*—all are conditional upon what exactly God wills to create. God, being just, would not produce a universe, world, or creatures that are unable to meet their ends (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.28 & 29). See also Aquinas, *On the Power of God* III.16.

requires something additional to be complete. God, however, is already complete, and thus God's goodness does not require anything outside of God.⁴⁷³

Next, Aquinas considers whether God's goodness necessitates that God will other creatures. Aquinas states, "if God wills His own goodness to be, He is under no necessity of willing the production of anything else; the antecedent of this conditional proposition is necessary, but not the consequent; for, as we proved in Book I, God necessarily wills His goodness to be, but He does not necessarily will anything else."⁴⁷⁴ In book I, Aquinas argued that God wills God's goodness necessarily—God, a perfect being, cannot fail to will God's own (perfect) goodness.⁴⁷⁵ God wills other things, too, insofar as those things are ordered to God's goodness.⁴⁷⁶ Aquinas then argues that although God wills God's own goodness of absolute necessity, God wills the existence of other things by the necessity of supposition. God's will is immutable, and thus once God wills x God cannot stop willing x . Since God wills the existence of other things, God must continue to will the existence of other things. What Aquinas denies is that God wills the existence of things other than God with absolute necessity.⁴⁷⁷

Aquinas's insistence that God wills things other than God voluntarily and has neither internal nor external constraints upon that will suggests that Aquinas believes God's creative emanation is voluntary, free, and non-necessary. Aquinas says as much: "if we consider the matter correctly, it appears that [God] does not will other things necessarily."⁴⁷⁸ Things other than God are ordered to God's goodness as an end, and because God is perfect already—

⁴⁷³ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.28 & 29.

⁴⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.28 & 29.

⁴⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.74, 81.

⁴⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81. Aquinas consistently speaks of God's goodness as a final cause of beings other than God. In so doing, Aquinas deviates from the Neoplatonic tradition of interpreting a divine emanation as an efficient cause *and* a final cause. See Wisnovsky, 64-65, 67.

⁴⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.83.

⁴⁷⁸ *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81.

God's perfection cannot be enhanced by creating—God need not create in order to fulfill that end.⁴⁷⁹

Despite Aquinas's assertion that God emanates things other than God voluntarily and freely, the fact that God is goodness might entail that God does indeed emanate creatures necessarily. Aquinas repeatedly employs the Pseudo-Dionysian principle that the good is self-diffusive. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in a discussion of God's goodness, Aquinas notes that "the communication of being and goodness arises from goodness."⁴⁸⁰ Aquinas asserts this based on (a) the nature and (b) the definition of the good. By nature, Aquinas says, "the good of each thing is its act and perfection." An agent acts insofar as it is able, and by acting, the agent "diffuses being and goodness to other things." Here, Aquinas appeals to Aristotle's comment in *Meteorologica* IV that the sign of a perfect being is that the being can "produce its like." Additionally, the nature of the good, Aquinas says, "comes from it being appetible," which is why the good can move an agent to act as a final cause of that agent. The good being appetible is "why it is said that the good is diffusive of itself and of being." God can be described as the good because God is the cause of all other existing beings.⁴⁸¹

Norman Kretzmann highlights this tension, noting that Aquinas refers to the principle that the good is self-diffusive repeatedly throughout many writings over the course of his career.⁴⁸² The comments, then, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* explored above are not unique or uncharacteristic of Aquinas's general approach to the question of the good being

⁴⁷⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81; Kretzmann, 220.

⁴⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.37. Aquinas first argues that must be good because God is perfect, that God is good because God, as the first mover, is what is desired by created things, and that God is the final cause of the universe.

⁴⁸¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.37.

⁴⁸² For a more comprehensive list of Aquinas's repetition of and reliance upon the principle that the good is self-diffusive, see Julien Peghaire, "L'Axiome 'Bonum est diffusivum sui' dans le néo-platonisme et le thomisme," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* (1932), 5-30, especially page 19.

self-diffusive. If the good is self-diffusive, then Aquinas seems to be dissembling when he says that God emanates because God wills to emanate: God, being the good, cannot fail to emanate. Kretzmann contends that Aquinas endorses the principle that the good is self-diffusive except in cases where Aquinas is specifically arguing that God does not create due to natural necessity.⁴⁸³ For example, Kretzmann mentions that in *On the Power of God*, in response to an objection that God would be denying God's own goodness by not creating, Aquinas asserts that God's goodness would not be harmed or denied by God not creating.⁴⁸⁴

While an interesting objection to Aquinas's doctrine of free and voluntary emanation, Kretzmann's challenge can be overcome. Primarily, Aquinas speaks of necessary emanation in the context of the procession of the Son from the Father. As noted above, Aquinas describes the emanation of the Son from the Father and of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son as necessary emanations. Aquinas does relate the Pseudo-Dionysian principle

⁴⁸³ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 224. According to Kretzmann, Aquinas has two problems to solve with respect to creation: first, if God wills God's own existence necessarily and this act of will includes God willing the existence of beings other than God, it seems that God must will the existence of other beings necessarily as well; second, God willing the existence of beings other than God implies multiplicity in God (219). Aquinas wards off the claim that God is not simple because God wills beings other than God by asserting that God wills these things in a single act of will in which God wills God's existence perfectly and wills other things insofar as God wills God's own existence (219-220). As Rahim Acar clarifies, God's will toward God's self and toward others have different modalities. God cannot fail to will God's own existence and goodness. God wills things other than God insofar as those other things are ordered to God's goodness. This distinction means that things other than God are not, properly speaking, the end of God's will. These things other than God are not required to meet that end; thus, they are one (optional) means to the end (which is God's goodness) (157; Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.3; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.75). Kretzmann argues that Aquinas's attempt to distinguish different modalities to aspects of God's willing is unsatisfactory in light of the fact that God is the good. If God is the good, then it seems wrong to say that God's goodness does not require the existence of beings other than God in light of the principle that the good is self-diffusive (221-224; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81). As Acar notes, Aquinas could possibly have resolved this tension by modifying his assertions either about the good or about God's will. Kretzmann finds Aquinas's account of the good being self-diffusive persuasive, so any attempt (on Aquinas's part) to modify what it means for the good to be self-diffusive is unlikely to persuade him that the potential incompatibility has been resolved. I contend that Aquinas could attenuate what he means by either the claim that (a) the good is self-diffusive by nature or the claim that (b) God emanates by will. As will become obvious in the following discussion, I suggest that Aquinas reinterprets the notion that the good is self-diffusive. The good is self-diffusive, but its diffusion occurs by will and not by nature.

⁴⁸⁴ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 224; Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15 ad 12. See also Kretzmann's discussion in "A General Problem of Creation," *Being and Goodness*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), 215-223 and "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," in *Journal of Philosophy* 80.10 (1983) 631-638.

of the self-diffusiveness of the good to the emanations within the Trinity at least once in his writings. In his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, Aquinas applies the Pseudo-Dionysian principle of the self-diffusiveness of the good to the procession the Son. This application occurs in the *sed contra* to the question, "Whether in the divine there are many persons."⁴⁸⁵ According to what Aquinas writes in the *sed contra*, the Pseudo-Dionysian principle can be applied to Trinitarian procession. Creatures are unable to perfectly receive God's goodness, so Aquinas concludes that God's goodness must be shared with something other than creatures. Aquinas concludes that in order for God's goodness to be shared, God must share God's goodness with something that shares God's essence. Accordingly, there is a sharing of God's goodness among the members of the Godhead.⁴⁸⁶ In this instance, God sharing God's goodness is necessary, but it is goodness shared within the Godhead.

Furthermore, Aquinas speaks of the Pseudo-Dionysian principle in terms of final, not efficient, causation. As Wippel notes, the results of Julien Peghaire's study of Aquinas's use of the Pseudo-Dionysian principle were that Aquinas uses it to speak of God's final, not efficient, causation.⁴⁸⁷ In the passage of *Summa Contra Gentiles* above in which Aquinas appeals to the Pseudo-Dionysian principle, it is clear that Aquinas believes the good to be appetible, or, as Wippel says, "the good is that which is the object of appetite."⁴⁸⁸ The good, then, is the *end* of God's will, and as the end of God's will, it is "diffusive of itself and of being."⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ I highlight this fact to emphasize that this may not be representative of Aquinas's position. While he does not dispute the *sed contra* in this question, it is not always his practice to do so.

⁴⁸⁶ *In Sent* I.2.1.4; Kretzmann, "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," 634.

⁴⁸⁷ Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God," 295, 297; Peghaire, *passim*.

⁴⁸⁸ Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God," 296.

⁴⁸⁹ Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God," 296.

The fact that the Pseudo-Dionysian principle is interpreted by Aquinas to apply to final causation is important for two reasons. First, as was noted above, according to Aquinas's analysis of necessary causes, final and formal causes do not necessitate their effects.⁴⁹⁰ So, the self-diffusiveness of the good is a feature of the good being a final cause, and final causes do not necessitate effects.⁴⁹¹ Second, Aquinas deviates from the standard Neoplatonic interpretation of the Pseudo-Dionysian principle, which was to apply the principle to both final and efficient causation. The only scenario in which Aquinas applies the principle to efficient causation is within the context of Trinitarian procession, not within the context of creation. God, then, is not forced by God's goodness to create.

Finally, Aquinas frequently speaks about the creative emanation as an act of will even when he discusses the diffusiveness of the good. For example, in the *Summa Theologiae* question nineteen, Aquinas is discussing God willing God's existence and the existence of other things. He says,

Natural things have a natural inclination not only with respect to their own proper good, to acquire it if [it is] not possessed, or if [it is] possessed, to rest in it; but also to spread abroad their proper good amongst others, in so far as possible. Hence, we see that every agent, in so far as it is perfect and in act, produces its like. It pertains, therefore, to the nature of the will to communicate as far as possible to others the good possessed; and especially does this pertain to the divine will, from which all perfection is derived in some kind of likeness. Hence, if natural things, in so far as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, it appertain how much more to

⁴⁹⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16. Kretzmann nonetheless argues that God's goodness necessitates the production of beings other than God whether it is a final or efficient cause. While Kretzmann is willing to admit that interpreting the Pseudo-Dionysian principle as a principle of final (not efficient) causation enables one to argue that Aquinas's philosophy leaves room for God to emanate by will, Kretzmann does not believe it allows for free choice on God's part. See "Goodness, Knowledge, and the Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," 635.

⁴⁹¹ Wippel notes that Kretzmann overlooks an additional argument for the conclusion that God does not will things other than God necessarily. Aquinas argues (in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81) that God wills other things insofar as they participate in God's goodness. But, since God's goodness is infinite, there are an infinite number of ways in which it could be participated. If God necessarily willed things other than God, God would bring that willing to fruition—there would exist an infinite number of things participating in the divine goodness in an infinite number of ways. However, there aren't an infinite number of things; thus, God does not will things other than God necessarily (Wippel, 294).

the divine will to communicate by likeness its own good to others as much as possible. Thus, then, [God] wills both Himself to be and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; inasmuch as it befits the divine goodness that other things should be partakers in it.⁴⁹²

In this passage, Aquinas explicitly connects the diffusion of good to the will of God. God makes beings like God because God wills to do so; this action is fitting of God and God's goodness. By connecting God's emanative act to an act of will, Aquinas is not (contra Kretzmann) endorsing the Pseudo-Dionysian principle that the good is self-diffusive by nature. Instead, Aquinas seems to be saying that the good is self-diffusive by will. There is no necessity of self-diffusion; instead, the self-diffusion is voluntary.

Aquinas denies that anything external or internal to God necessitates that God create. God, being self-sufficient, is not beholden to anything outside of God. Even God's nature—specifically, God's justice and God's goodness—does not entail that God must create. It seems, then, that one must take Aquinas at his word when he says that God creates freely as a result of a divine volition.

It is now evident that Aquinas does not subscribe to Avicenna's Neoplatonic model of emanation when he describes creating as emanating. Aquinas's account of God's emanation does not align with the central aspects of Neoplatonic emanation. He rejects the principle that from one simple being, only one simple being can be produced, even within the context of the necessary emanations within the Godhead. He rejects the notion that God can only create a multiplicity of diverse things through mediation; in fact, he rejects the

⁴⁹² ST Ia.19.2 resp: Res enim naturalis non solum habet naturalem inclinationem respectu proprii boni, ut acquirat ipsum cum non habet, vel ut quiescat in illo cum habet; sed etiam ut proprium bonum in alia diffundat, secundum quod possibile est. Unde videmus quod omne agens, inquantum est actu et perfectum, facit sibi simile. Unde et hoc pertinet ad rationem voluntatis, ut bonum quod quis habet, aliis communicet, secundum quod possibile est. Et hoc praecipue pertinet ad voluntatem divinam, a qua, per quamdam similitudinem, derivatur omnis perfectio. Unde, si res naturales, inquantum perfectae sunt, suum bonum aliis communicant, multo magis pertinet ad voluntatem divinam, ut bonum suum aliis per similitudinem communicet, secundum quod possibile est. Sic igitur vult et se esse, et alia. Sed se ut finem, alia vero ut ad finem, inquantum condecet divinam bonitatem etiam alia ipsam participare.

notion that created beings have the capability to produce something from nothing. He rejects the notion that God creates necessarily. Though the emanations within the Godhead are necessary, creation, which is the emanation outside of the Godhead, is voluntary. The one similarity between Aquinas's account of creation by emanation and the Neoplatonic account of emanation is that God produces being.

C. Creative Emanation and Creation by Efficient Causation

What remains to be seen is how Aquinas relates talk of creation by efficient causation to talk of creation by emanation. What must be seen is whether Aquinas intends to express something distinctive by these two ways of talking about creation. If he does not intend to express something distinctive, then it remains to be seen why Aquinas would continue to use both ways of talking about creation. Possible explanations for the retention of the language of emanation and efficient causation in discussions of creation will be explored.

Aquinas's discussion of creating by efficient causation and creating by emanation reveal that Aquinas intends to express a similar concept by each way of talking. In laying out these two models of creation, Aquinas appeals to action as the primary characterization of each type of causation. An efficient cause acts, and this action results in some effect. A being emanates, and it seems that emanation should be classified as an action. Emanating is something that a being *does*, and this *doing* is simply acting.

Similarly, creating both by efficient causation and by emanation involve the production of something from no underlying material. Creation, whether discussed in terms of efficient causation or emanation, is *ex nihilo*. Aquinas does not deviate from the notion of creation being *ex nihilo* whether or not he describes it as efficient causation or emanation.

Without the additional aspects of emanation—the emanation of only one thing by a simple being, production via intermediaries, and necessary emanation—that are associated with Neoplatonic conceptions of emanation, it seems that Aquinas does not intend to convey something distinctive by speaking of creation in terms of efficient causation versus in terms of emanation. Creation is the production of being from nothing, and the act of producing being can be understood either in terms of God as the efficient cause or of God as the emanator. That these two ways of talking fit well together should perhaps not be surprising.⁴⁹³ If emanating is an act, then by definition emanating is a way to express some sort of efficient causation. Creation by emanation refers to a specific type of efficient causation—the production of being from no pre-existing, underlying substrate.

If Aquinas does not intend to convey anything distinctive by discussing God as efficient cause in addition to discussing God as emanator, then one might wonder why he would continue to speak of God in both of these ways. When two ways of speaking are each used to express an incredibly similar concept but one of those ways of speaking is associated with a philosophical approach that has been soundly rejected, it seems puzzling why one would continue using both of those ways of speaking. In Aquinas's case, there are a number of plausible reasons for his retention of the language of efficient causation and emanation in the context of creation.

⁴⁹³ Support for the notion that emanation is another way to talk about efficient causation more generally comes from Aquinas's discussion of the divine procession in *On the Power of God*. As an objection to the notion that there is procession in God, Aquinas offers this critique: "inasmuch as the more excellent creatures are more like to God, that which is found in the lower creatures and not in the higher is not found in God: for instance, dimensive quantity, matter, and so forth. Now procession is to be found in the lower creatures, where one individual engenders another of the same species: whereas this does not obtain in the higher creatures. Neither therefore in God is procession to be found" (10.5). Aquinas replies that intellectual substances have processions of their wills, and this sort of procession is similar to the procession in the divine trinity. Aquinas does not deny that lower creatures have processions—not intellectual processions like angels and like God, but the procession of another being of their kind. So, it seems that Aquinas was comfortable using the language of procession even in the context of ordinary efficient causation, namely, substantial change.

The first plausible explanation for Aquinas retaining language of efficient causation and emanation in the context of creation is that Aquinas was trying to hold onto as much of philosophical and theological history as possible. Philosophers have discussed the origins of the universe in terms of emanation for hundreds of years, and influential Christian theologians adopted this way of speaking of creation in the early period of the church. By continuing this usage, Aquinas linked his analysis of creation to the analyses of those who had come before. Standing in a long line of tradition, Aquinas continued to use common words even when offering a new interpretation of those words. The language of emanation is not helpful or important for making any specific philosophical point(s); instead, the language of emanation is used to maintain conformity with the works of previous scholars, presumably because Aquinas recognized something correct about their language but thought their point could be better illuminated in different contexts.

The second plausible explanation is that although these terms mean nothing distinctive in the context of creation, the terms are useful for maintaining some philosophical distinctions. Instead of retaining this language as an act of fealty to those who came before, Aquinas uses the language of efficient causation and emanation within the context of creation because this language is helpful for making some important distinctions. Aquinas uses emanation language within the context of creation, but he also uses it in his discussion of the procession within the Godhead. Emanation is a way of talking about any divine procession, whether it is internal or external to the Godhead.⁴⁹⁴ In Aquinas's definition of creation, he specifies that creation is an "emanation of things from the First Principle."⁴⁹⁵ Retaining the language of emanation, even while rejecting wholesale a

⁴⁹⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 10.1.5.

⁴⁹⁵ *ST* Ia.45.

Neoplatonic conception of emanation, allows Aquinas to easily speak of God's action in one word. What God does is God emanates. God emanates within the Trinity and outside the Trinity, but the entirety of God's action can be understood as emanation.⁴⁹⁶ So, Aquinas retains the language of emanation because it is useful—it is not useful because it expresses something distinctive about God creating but because it allows Aquinas to describe God's action simply and easily. This non-Neoplatonic, sanitized conception of divine emanation is important for framing Aquinas's larger theological task, which is expressing the *exitus* and *reditus* to God.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Aquinas speaks of creation primarily in terms of efficient causation. God is the first efficient cause, but when God creates, God creates *ex nihilo*. I have also argued that Aquinas views divine efficient causation as a type of Aristotelian efficient causation. Due to the work of other Aristotelian commentators and some tensions in Aristotelian philosophy, Aquinas is able to find room within the Aristotelian causal framework for efficient causation without patients. Finally, I have argued that Aquinas's retention of the language of emanation within the context of creation does not entail a retention of Neoplatonic emanation. Instead, Aquinas talks of efficient causation without patients in a nearly identical manner to emanative creation. I maintain that Aquinas retains the language of emanation, even though he strips it of its Neoplatonic components, because emanation allows Aquinas to easily discuss all of God's productive acts—those within the Trinity and those without.

⁴⁹⁶ See *ST* Ia.27 and 45; *On the Power of God* 10.1.

CHAPTER FOUR

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the implications of Avicenna's and Aquinas's discussion of divine creation. I will begin by exploring some of the similarities and differences in their approaches to describing divine creation. In so doing, I will highlight the importance of this study for interpreting both Avicenna's and Aquinas's discussions of creation and their larger philosophical discussions. I will then explore what these similarities reveal about the metaphysics of causation in both Aquinas's and Avicenna's theories of causation. I will close by examining some of the importance of Avicenna's and Aquinas's theories of divine causation in discussions of creation and causation. This study proves helpful for adjudicating disputes about creation, Neoplatonic emanation, and Aristotelian efficient causation in the work of historical and modern philosophers.

II. Comparison

In this section, I offer a comparison of the approaches used by Avicenna and Aquinas toward solving the problem of creation introduced in chapter one. The manner in which Avicenna and Aquinas address the discrepancies between the philosophical accounts of causation in the theological account of creation are distinct but follow a similar pattern: Avicenna and Aquinas both deny the apparent incompatibility between these philosophical accounts of causation and the theological account of creation. For Avicenna, Neoplatonic emanation does not require emanation to be a necessary act; neither does Aristotelian

efficient causation require there to be a patient underlying the change. Thus, both Neoplatonic emanation and Aristotelian efficient causation, when the theories themselves and their implications have been properly understood, are compatible with theological account of creation as both voluntary and *ex nihilo*. For Aquinas, Neoplatonic emanation can be either necessary or voluntary, and in the case of divine creation that emanation is voluntary; Aristotelian efficient causation is best understood to be characterized by the action of an agent, which means that an agent acting with or without a patient is an efficient cause. Thus, both Neoplatonic emanation and Aristotelian efficient causation are truly compatible with theological account of creation.

However, the specific explanations offered for how these theories do not conflict are not identical. Instead, Avicenna's account of creation includes the details of Neoplatonic emanation, and elsewhere when discussing the metaphysics of being Avicenna explains that there must be an Aristotelian efficient cause that does not involve a patient underlying the cause.⁴⁹⁷ Aquinas, in contrast, discusses divine creation predominantly—at least in his philosophical discussions—in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation, yet he defines creation as emanation, albeit emanation stripped of most of the specifically Neoplatonic interpretations of emanation.⁴⁹⁸ To further study the similarities and differences between these approaches, I will examine the salient features of their explications of Neoplatonic emanation and Aristotelian efficient causation.

A. Neoplatonic Emanation

The pertinent features of Avicenna's and Aquinas's interpretation and appropriation of Neoplatonic emanation both as a theory of causation and an explanation of God's

⁴⁹⁷ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* book nine and book six, respectively.

⁴⁹⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* questions forty-five through forty-nine and sixty-five through seventy-four.

creative act will be examined. Starting from the general traits of Neoplatonic thought (discussed in chapter one), Avicenna and Aquinas apply the language of emanation to creation. What causal aspects are involved in Neoplatonic emanation deserves special attention, for it is a major source of difference between Avicenna's and Aquinas's accounts.

1. Avicenna on Neoplatonic Emanation

Avicenna's discussion of the origination of the universe depends heavily on Neoplatonic emanation as an explanation of that origination. Avicenna's account of the origination of the universe draws upon the major themes of Neoplatonic emanation: what is maximally good overflows with goodness; this maximally good being is perfect, simple, necessary, and self-sufficient; the good is self-diffusive, which (at least partially) explains why the maximally good being emanates; the maximally good being produces additional beings, and it uses no pre-existing material to do so; and the maximally good being may produce some of these additional beings via mediators. Avicenna adopts the claim that God is the maximally good being, and he also adopts the claim that God is self-diffusive. However, Avicenna denies that God is self-diffusive by nature; instead, Avicenna claims that God is self-diffusive because God wills to be self-diffusive. When emanating, God emanates one simple being—and it must be so, Avicenna argues, because what God emanates must be like God. Thus, this emanated being must be singular and simple. Avicenna asserts that God emanates one simple being, an appeal grounded in the Plotinian Neoplatonic tradition, and Avicenna also relies upon the Neoplatonic notion of the presence of the primary cause's causal power in the effects of anything produced by it. God is indirectly responsible for the

existence of a multiplicity of numerically and qualitatively different beings. God creates one thing immediately and other things mediately.⁴⁹⁹

To make his account of emanation to cohere with his general understanding of God—namely that God is simple and perfect—Avicenna relies heavily on the principle found in the Neoplatonic tradition that states that emanation by the maximally good being will produce one and only one being and that this newly produced being must be simple.⁵⁰⁰ In order to account for the existence of a variety of numerically and qualitatively distinct beings, there must be intermediaries involved in the process of creation. In asserting that intermediaries are (and must be) involved in the process of emanating the known universe, Avicenna follows the understanding of Neoplatonic emanation promulgated by his forbearers. The *need* for emanators depends upon Avicenna's understanding of what it must mean for a simple being to produce new being.

Avicenna deviates from the traditional understanding of Neoplatonic emanation by denying that God emanates because of some necessity of God's nature. Instead, Avicenna asserts that God emanates because God wills to emanate. Although God's will cannot be other than it is—to say so implies some imperfection in God's will—it is the case that God's will is involved in the process of determining to emanate. That God's will is involved in the process of emanation entails that Avicenna denies the traditionally understood Neoplatonic

⁴⁹⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing*, IX.4.4; Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* V-X IX.4, p. 481.

⁵⁰⁰ This is in contrast to the Proclean tradition, which understands the maximally good being to be able to produce numerically and qualitatively different beings directly *because each of these beings reflect the perfection of the maximally good being to varying degrees*. See Hankey, “*Ab Uno Simplici non est nisi Unum*: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation.”

claim that God creates by nature and not by will. It further complicates the claim that God emanates necessarily, for necessary emanation is typically contrasted with an act of the will.⁵⁰¹

The deviation from traditional Neoplatonic emanation can be explained in two ways. First, Avicenna conceived of God differently than many of the Neoplatonists insofar as he believed that God had a will that could be known. Unlike Plotinus, who *at least at times* speaks as if the One lacked will, Avicenna is convinced that God has and exercises a will.⁵⁰² Thus, there must be a role for the will in whatever God does. Avicenna is able to explain how God's will functions within the process of emanation in a way that is largely faithful to the traditional Neoplatonic approach to emanation.⁵⁰³

Second, Avicenna could be specifically amending his Neoplatonic account of emanation to cohere with the Islamic notion of creation. Creation in the Abrahamic tradition is always *voluntary*, and thus one must be able to say that emanation is voluntary if creating is to be understood in terms of emanating. By finding room within Neoplatonic emanation to account for God's will, Avicenna is able to bring these two traditions into agreement that, at least on some level, God's will is involved in the production of being.

2. Aquinas on Neoplatonic Emanation

Whereas Avicenna follows the traditional Neoplatonic conception of emanation quite closely—aside from carving out room for divine will in the process of emanation—Aquinas deviates in significant ways from the standard understanding of Neoplatonic

⁵⁰¹ For example, see Zedler's influential article, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna in the 'De Potentia Dei.'"

⁵⁰² Plotinus, *Enneads* V 1, 6, 15-27 and VI 9, 6, 40. As Michael Chase notes, the second passage denying a role for will in the One is disputed by Georges Leorux. See Michael Chase, "Abrahamic Creation and Neoplatonic Emanation in Greek, Arabic, and Latin: Reflections on a recent paper by Richard Taylor" (Paper presented at Aquinas and the Arabs conference, Paris, France, May 31, 2012) http://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/AAP_Papers/Chase_Paris_31_May_2012.html (accessed April 1, 2013), 6; for Avicenna's discussion of the divine will, which is also discussed in chapter two, see *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.7.

⁵⁰³ For a discussion of how, specifically, Avicenna does this, please see chapter two.

emanation. Like Avicenna, Aquinas adopts the principle that says that what is maximally good overflows with goodness and that this maximally good being is simple, necessary, and self-sufficient.⁵⁰⁴ Aquinas also adopts the principle that says that when producing something via emanation, an emanator produces additional beings without using pre-existing material to do so. Aquinas's significant deviations from the interpretation of Neoplatonic emanation adopted by Avicenna deal with questions regarding the self-diffusiveness of the good, the role of the divine will in emanation, and the role for intermediaries in emanation.

Aquinas, like Avicenna, asserts that God produces being because God wills to do so. This influences Aquinas's discussion of the principles of Neoplatonic emanation (a) that the good is self-diffusive and (b) whether there is a role for the divine will in emanation. Unlike Avicenna, Aquinas does not directly address the role of the divine will in *emanation*; instead, he addresses a general question about the role of God's will in God's actions: God, as a creature with a will, does what God does because God wills to do so.⁵⁰⁵ There is no reason to suggest that such an analysis of the role of God's will would *not* apply to divine emanation, and as I discuss in chapter three, it seems best to conclude that, like Avicenna, Aquinas believes that God's emanation involves God's will.

The principle regarding the self-diffusiveness of the good relates closely to whether God *must* will the existence of other beings. While it is the case that for both Avicenna and for Aquinas, the divine will is not subject to change, neither philosopher asserts that the immutability of the divine will entails that God wills the existence of other beings with absolute necessity. Instead, God willing the existence of other beings depends upon what

⁵⁰⁴ See Aquinas's discussions in *Summa Theologica* Ia questions 2 through 6 and 44 through 46.

⁵⁰⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.23; *On the Power of God* 3.15.

other things God wills—namely, God’s goodness.⁵⁰⁶ Not only is there a role for the divine will in emanation, but it is also the case that the divine will to produce other beings is not, strictly speaking, necessitated.

Unlike Avicenna’s account of divine emanation, Aquinas’s account of divine emanation includes *clear* examples of natural emanation and voluntary emanation. The production of beings other than God is an example of voluntary emanation in both Avicenna’s and Aquinas’s accounts. Aquinas, however, articulates at least one instance of necessary emanation—the production of the members of the Trinity.⁵⁰⁷ God simply is the sort of being that exists in three persons. With Avicenna’s account of divine emanation, it is unclear whether there are emanations that are non-voluntary.⁵⁰⁸ Up to this point, Aquinas and Avicenna have remarkably similar understandings of emanation.

Aquinas deviates most significantly from Avicenna regarding the issue of whether intermediaries are important to (or are required by) an account of divine emanation. On Aquinas’s analysis, there *must not* be intermediaries who are involved in the process of creating and produce entirely new beings out of nothing: the maximally good and maximally existing being alone has the ability to produce something *ex nihilo* because only a fully actualized being can produce something *ex nihilo*.⁵⁰⁹ Wherever Aquinas encounters the notion of intermediaries in creation, such as in Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Liber de Causis*, Aquinas, at every turn, reinterprets these references to intermediaries as divisions in types of created beings.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ For a discussion in Aquinas, see *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81 & 83.

⁵⁰⁷ See Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 2.4 resp; *ST Ia*.41.2 ad 5.

⁵⁰⁸ A case can be made that because the Intellects emanate due to desiring to be like God, the emanations are willed (or are, at least, the result of an act of will). It is possible, though, to argue that the will is not immediately causally relevant to the emanation—the will does not directly produce the emanation; instead, it merely produces the desire to be like God, and the desire to be like God results in the emanation.

⁵⁰⁹ See Aquinas, *ST Ia*.63.3.

⁵¹⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 16, p. 108.

Aquinas, then, interprets emanation significantly differently from the Plotinian tradition of Neoplatonism.

Furthermore, Aquinas follows a different tradition of Neoplatonic emanation than Avicenna. Aquinas follows the Proclean tradition that included intermediaries but also included the assertion that what the One produces is being, which Aquinas uses to argue that God can produce a multiplicity of beings directly.⁵¹¹ In so doing, Aquinas applies resources within the Proclean tradition in a distinctive manner. There is likeness *but not equality* between God and what God creates, and it is this likeness that allows beings other than God to reflect God's goodness.⁵¹² It is important for Aquinas that other beings do not equally or perfectly reflect God's goodness, for it is only when something represents its exemplar perfectly that the exemplar can produce only one thing.⁵¹³ That the universe is produced directly does not, as Avicenna alleges, threaten the simplicity of God: it would only threaten divine simplicity if God did not emanate by will, for the will explains how there can be multiple objects directly created without there being (a) multiple things known (for God knows only Godself) (b) multiple things willed (for God can have a compound yet singular will).⁵¹⁴ In asserting that it is possible for multiple things to be directly created by God and

⁵¹¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 20, p. 122. For an interesting discussion of the differences in these traditions with regard to emanation in Aquinas's views on creation, see Hankey's "*Ab Uno Simplici non est nisi Unum*: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas's Doctrine of Creation."

⁵¹² Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.16. resp 11.

⁵¹³ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 ad 2.

⁵¹⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.47.1 ad 1. See also te Velde's discussion on pp. 101-107 in *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*.

reflect God's goodness, Aquinas adopts a different conception of emanation than Avicenna.⁵¹⁵

B. Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Using Aristotle's discussion of efficient causation as the cause which brings about a change in an underlying patient as a starting point, the salient features of Avicenna's and Aquinas's interpretation and appropriation of Aristotelian efficient causation both as a theory of causation and an explanation of God creating will be examined. Avicenna and Aquinas explore the implications of this discussion. Both question whether Aristotle's explanation of efficient causation leaves anything unexpressed, and both determine (yet for distinct reasons) that Aristotle must have left some of his conception of efficient causation unarticulated.

1. Avicenna on Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Avicenna's explication of Aristotelian efficient causation includes a primary division in types of efficient causes: there are natural efficient causes, which produce change by activating a potentiality in a patient, and there are metaphysical efficient causes, which produce change by bringing about the existence of something new. This natural efficient causation is the typical form of efficient causation, and it explains most cases of efficient causation. On Avicenna's analysis, natural efficient causation is a correct and useful way for understanding the types of causation we regularly encounter in this world. However, there

⁵¹⁵ In denying the principle that from one simple being, one being must be produced, Aquinas deviates from the interpretation of the *Liber de Causis* offered by Albert in his *De Causis et Processu Universitatis*, Albert's commentary on the *Liber de Causis*. There, Albert endorses the principle that from one simple being, one being can be produced. However, he asserts that the one being produced by God is *being itself*. As Bonin notes, "God produces all things by producing one thing" (Therese Bonin, *Creation as Emanation* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 2001), 73). See Albert, *De Causis et Processu Universitatis*, 1.4.4, 2.1.2, and 2.1.19 and Bonin, *Creation as Emanation* 39-40 and 73.

simply must exist another kind of efficient cause, a cause that can bring about the existence of a new thing, even when that new thing is produced of pre-existing material.

Avicenna's account of metaphysical efficient causation includes three important facets: first, a metaphysical efficient cause does *not* need some underlying patient in order to bring about an effect, for a metaphysical efficient cause can, under certain circumstances, produce something *ex nihilo*. Second, a metaphysical efficient cause is the sort of efficient cause that is able to bestow a new form upon what it produces, whether that production is from pre-existing material or not. Third, it is the metaphysical efficient cause that plays the role of the sustainer of what is produced. It may be the case that our builder, Bob, is a natural efficient cause of the house—he does reconfigure the timbers to produce a livable space—but the involvement of a metaphysical efficient cause is still entailed in order to explain how the house continues to exist after Bob leaves (or worse, dies). Agents who are metaphysical causes include God, the Intellects, and the Giver of Forms. Positing a metaphysical efficient cause allows Avicenna to address these issues not explicitly addressed by Aristotle. Avicenna discusses these issues as though they elucidate something left implicit in Aristotle's thought; he does not present himself as though he is significantly amending Aristotle's thought.⁵¹⁶

There are several influential underlying philosophical beliefs that are related to the difficulties associated with Aristotle's account of natural efficient causation. One is revealed by Avicenna's opening comments on the study of metaphysics: Avicenna asserts that metaphysics is the study of existence as such.⁵¹⁷ To study existence as such, one must be able

⁵¹⁶ Given the medieval inclination to hold on to their philosophical and religious heritage, it is unsurprising that Avicenna would refrain from announcing these enhancements of Aristotle's theory *as* enhancements to Aristotle's theory.

⁵¹⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.2 p. 31-34; Richardson, 21.

to discuss how things come into existence from nothing. Thus, one can expect to discuss a type of causation in which being is brought about in the study of metaphysics.

Additionally, a cluster of beliefs related to the necessity and contingency of certain beings—for which Avicenna argues extensively in the earlier books of the *Metaphysics of the Healing*—cast light on the limitations of Aristotle’s original explanation of efficient causation. Some being exists necessarily.⁵¹⁸ Given the fact that some beings are dependent and others are necessary, it is clear that the contingent beings must have some originator. A corollary belief to the belief that some being is necessary, then, is that there is some production or origination of being. What this origination (and, if applicable, this originator) is like and how such beings come about depends upon another (well argued) philosophical belief of Avicenna’s—that being is distinct from essence.⁵¹⁹ This additional underlying philosophical belief, then, is that being is not identical to essence. Avicenna, then, introduces a distinction between metaphysical and natural efficient causes based largely upon his adherence to the belief that some beings exist necessarily and others exist contingently and that there is a difference between being and essence.

2. Aquinas on Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Aquinas follows Avicenna in distinguishing between two types of Aristotelian efficient causes. Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s way of discussing efficient causes, asserting that there is a natural efficient cause that brings about change by activating a potentiality in a patient. The patient goes from being one way to being another way as the result of this act. Following Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes between substantial generation—the production of a different substance—or accidental generation—alteration in some substance that already

⁵¹⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.6 p. 30 1-7.

⁵¹⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.5 p. 24-29.

exists. Like Avicenna, Aquinas does not think that this type of efficient causation is sufficient to explain all cases of efficient causation, and thus Aquinas addresses a metaphysical efficient cause.

Like Avicenna, Aquinas asserts that a metaphysical efficient cause produces something that did not previously exist, neither in totality nor in its component parts. The metaphysical efficient does not use any pre-existing material to produce its effect; instead, it produces its effect entirely *ex nihilo*. Only a certain sort of agent can produce something *ex nihilo*, which means that unlike Avicenna, there is and *can be* only one metaphysical efficient cause: God. Aquinas limits metaphysical efficient causation to God and God only because one must be fully actualized in order to produce something *ex nihilo*. Avicenna does not tie production *ex nihilo* to an agent's state of actualization, but Aquinas does directly and forcefully.

Avicenna relies explicitly on several philosophical beliefs in his articulation of metaphysical efficient causation, but Aquinas is less direct and transparent regarding influential philosophical beliefs on this topic. Aquinas does appeal to a distinction between *being* and *becoming* to explain why the standard explanation of an efficient cause needs additional explanation.⁵²⁰ Aquinas also appeals to the notion that there must be some originator for what currently exists because what exists now may exist or may fail to exist.⁵²¹ Aquinas shares these philosophical beliefs with Avicenna.

Aquinas deviates from Avicenna's set of underlying philosophical beliefs regarding the importance of the distinction between necessary and non-necessary beings. Whereas Aquinas does make reference to the notion that some beings are contingent (and thus their

⁵²⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1 resp.

⁵²¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.2.3 resp.

existence must be explained), he does not argue extensively regarding the necessity of the First Being. Instead, Aquinas devotes his energy to defending the claim that God is fully actualized, perfect, and simple.⁵²² Of course, such a being would exist necessarily, but it may be telling that Aquinas focuses his argumentative efforts elsewhere.

Aquinas's elucidation of Aristotelian efficient causation involves a distinctive understanding of what separates efficient causation from other types of causation. Aquinas broadens the definition of efficient causation to include both natural and metaphysical efficient causation types by defining efficient causation as an effect that comes about as a result of an agent's act. This broader conception of efficient causation includes the natural efficient cause and it includes the metaphysical efficient cause that produces its effect *ex nihilo*. By arguing that the true mark of efficient causation is that an agent *acts* to bring about the change, Aquinas is able to argue that there need not be any patient underlying the change. Thus, patients are not a necessary component of efficient causation.

III. Metaphysics of Causation

In this section, I address the importance of the above discussion for the metaphysics of causation. Examining Avicenna's and Aquinas's accounts of God's action in creating makes it possible to delineate what sorts of causes there are, even though these sorts of causes may be limited strictly to instances of creating. I then discuss to what extent Avicenna's and Aquinas's causal theories are Aristotelian or Neoplatonic, additionally addressing how these theories of causation are related to each other. It is helpful to know whether these theories discuss *identical*, *similar*, or *dissimilar* instances of causation. The longer-term impact of Avicenna's and Aquinas's causal theories is briefly explored as well. The

⁵²² Aquinas, *ST* Ia. questions 3-11; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I questions 14-28 and 37-48.

section closes with a discussion of the usefulness of this theory for answering a lingering question regarding the appellation of ‘creation’ as applied to Neoplatonic emanation and metaphysical efficient causation.

A. What Types of Causes There Are

1. Avicenna

On Avicenna’s analysis, there are efficient causes that act on a patient. Here, he closely follows Aristotle’s own analysis: an efficient cause activates some potentiality in a patient, thus changing said patient. The agent is prior to the effect in some way. The patient goes from being one way to being another way. The change—the activation of the potentiality—is wrought by the efficient cause’s action. Such efficient causes can be natural—that is, agents that act by nature—or they can be volitional—that is, agents that act by will. So, efficient cause C is the cause of some change in patient P if C is in some way prior to P and some action of C brings about change in to P.

There exists another type of efficient cause that does *not* act upon a preexisting patient but still produces something new: in this circumstance, the change is the existence of something new, something that comes to be as a result of the agent’s action. The agent still must be prior to its effect in some way, but there is no patient that underlies this change: the agent does not necessarily act *upon* something to bring about said change. This metaphysical efficient cause M is the cause of some thing O if M produces O *ex nihilo*.

Avicenna adds another layer, so to speak, to his robust explanation of efficient causation by arguing that metaphysical efficient causation includes both the production of something new and the sustenance of something. A builder is an efficient cause of a building but is not, strictly speaking, the metaphysical efficient cause because he is not responsible for

the preservation of that building's existence. A metaphysical efficient cause M is the cause of some thing O if M produces O and M sustains the existence of O in some way. Avicenna believes that any production *ex nihilo* involves the agent sustaining the new substance.

Coupled with Avicenna's lengthy treatment of Aristotelian efficient causation is his general endorsement of Neoplatonic emanation as a manner of causation. God emanates, producing the First Intellect by an act in accordance with its will. God is bound it emanate only one simple thing, and each intellect emanates as well, and, it seems likely that those intellects emanate in accordance with their wills.⁵²³ So far, then, it seems that agent A emanates B when A wills to emanate. It seems incorrect to argue that agent A emanates B when A wills to emanate B because Avicenna does not specify that the later Intellects intend to emanate precisely the thing they produce. In God's case, it seems likely that God emanated the First Intellect because God intended to emanate the First Intellect specifically, but for the other Intellects, it seems that they intended to emanate something as a component of their larger intention to be as like God as possible. What remains unclear is whether there are emanations that are produced by nature instead of by will. As noted, Avicenna asserts that the Intellects will their celestial spheres to move in a circular manner, but it is not clear that everything they do is volitional.⁵²⁴ In the case of voluntary emanation, an agent E emanates effect I if E wills to bring about the existence of I and initiates an emanation that, directly or indirectly results in the existence of I. E's volition must be congruent with E's nature or essence. In the case of natural emanation, which may be a theoretical type of causation, agent E emanates effect I if E has a nature that invariably leads

⁵²³ Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, p. 88-9.

⁵²⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysica* p.88-9

(at least in certain circumstances) to the existence of I and initiates an emanation that, directly or indirectly, results in the existence of I.⁵²⁵

2. Aquinas

On Aquinas's analysis, efficient causation is the type of causation wherein some agent acts. The focus of Aquinas's analysis of efficient causation is the action performed by the agent. Accordingly, there are at least two general classes of efficient causation: instances in which the agent acts upon some patient and instances in which the agent does not act upon some agent. An efficient cause, in actualizing some potentiality in the patient, affects a change in either the accidental or substantial form of its patient.⁵²⁶ An efficient cause E is the cause of some change in patient P if E is in some way prior to P and some action of E brings about some change in P.

Aquinas discusses efficient causes as causes that conserve or sustain their effects. Like Avicenna, he asserts that some efficient causes both produce or alter some effect and are responsible for the continued existence of that effect. An efficient cause E is the cause of the continued existence in patient P if E is in some way prior to P and some action of E sustains the existence of P. In this type of efficient causation, the central focus for Aquinas is still the action of the agent—which, Aquinas argues, is some continuation of the action by which God produces things *ex nihilo*.⁵²⁷

Since action is the primary indicator of an efficient cause—an efficient cause must act in order to bring about some change—Aquinas is able to explain how an efficient cause could act *without* a patient. The analysis of this type of efficient causation depends entirely

⁵²⁵ I do not include Taylor's transcendentally necessary type of emanation as a potential type of emanation because it does not occur in Avicenna's writings.

⁵²⁶ Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae* 1-3.

⁵²⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.104.1 resp 1.

upon the agent's action. An efficient cause E is the cause of P if E is in some way prior to P and some action of E brings about P. A further complication is that for Aquinas, there can be only one efficient cause who acts without a patient: God. As a fully actualized being, God has the ability to produce new being without any patient to underlie that production. So, more strictly, the efficient cause G is the cause of P if G is in some way prior to P and some action of G brings about P. If creation is understood passively, the formulation would be that the efficient cause G is the cause of P if G is in some way prior to P and P depends on G for its existence.

When specifying precisely what emanation is like in terms of creating, it is important to note that Aquinas differs from Avicenna by denying that any intermediaries are productive of new being from nothing. Aquinas must offer a different analysis of voluntary emanation. Aquinas's analysis would instead be that agent E produces effect I if E wills to bring about the existence of I (a volition that must be congruent with E's nature or essence) and initiates an emanation that directly results in the existence of I. Because only God can emanate entirely new being, Aquinas's understanding of emanation in creating could be articulated as an G producing effect I if G wills to bring about the existence of I (a volition that must be congruent with G's nature or essence) and initiates an emanation that directly results in the existence of I.

While Avicenna's approach to natural emanation may be merely theoretical, Aquinas outlines cases of natural emanation, both cases in which God produces a natural emanation and in which other agents do so. It is difficult to lay out divine natural emanation in similar terms to voluntary emanation, however, because what is emanated by God are the persons in the Trinity. What God emanates is, strictly speaking, also God. So, it is tempting to initially

posit that in natural emanation, agent E produces effect I if E has a nature that invariably leads to the existence of I and initiates an emanation that directly results in the existence of I. But this proposal must be modified to apply to the Trinity, given the relation between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One such attempt might be to say that agent GF generates GS if GF has a nature that invariably leads to the generation of GS and GF exists. This attempt accurately emphasizes the close connection between God's essence and God's existence as a Trinitarian being.

Let us apply this analysis to at least one other case of natural emanation, namely the sun emanating light. The sun emanates light if the sun has a nature that invariably leads to the generation of light and if the sun exists. However, this analysis glosses over the need for the sun to exist in the sort of environment in which it is able to produce light; this may be oversimplifying the physical processes needed in order for the sun to actually produce light. The difference between God and the sun is that the sun depends upon certain circumstances other than its existence to produce light. So, a better analysis for the sun would be that the sun produces light if the sun has a nature that invariably leads to the existence of light in certain circumstances, the sun exists, and those circumstances are met. The sun fulfilling its nature, as it were, requires *more* than the brute existence of the sun. So, for natural emanations produced by beings other than God, agent E produces effect I if E has a nature that invariably leads to the existence of I in certain circumstances, has those circumstances met, and initiates an emanation that directly results in the existence of I.

B. Classification of Types of Causes

Given the interpretive liberties—that are, in Avicenna's and Aquinas's opinions, clearly rooted in a careful analysis of these theories—that Avicenna and Aquinas take when

elucidating Aristotelian efficient causation and the production of the universe by Neoplatonic emanation, it is worthwhile to discuss whether these theories ought to still be termed ‘Aristotelian’ and ‘Neoplatonic’ in Avicenna’s treatment of them. To the extent that each may be termed ‘Aristotelian’ or ‘Neoplatonic,’ it is certainly the case that there are elements more (or less) in line with the traditional interpretation of those theories. We turn first to Avicenna’s treatment of Aristotle’s efficient causation.

1. Avicenna

a. Aristotelian efficient causation

Avicenna’s metaphysical efficient causation preserves important aspects of Aristotle’s efficient causation. First, the agent must precede the effect in some way, whether this is ontologically or temporally. Second, the agent is responsible for the effect. Were the agent not to act, the effect would not occur (or, at least, it would have to occur some other way). The role of the patient, that which underlies the change, is radically different—there simply is no patient in some instances of metaphysical efficient causation. The patient, which goes from being one way to being another way in typical cases of efficient causation, comes into being in metaphysical efficient causation.

In a larger way, Avicenna’s discussion of metaphysical efficient causation involves Avicenna attempting to answer lingering questions raised by Aristotelian scholarship. What, exactly, does it mean to bring something into existence? Does Aristotle’s discussion of the Unmoved Mover require that something is responsible for preserving the universe?⁵²⁸ Avicenna draws on these questions raised by medieval interpreters and attempts to use the explanations provided by Aristotle as a starting-point for answering these questions.

⁵²⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* X.7 1072a26-27.

Avicenna's account of metaphysical efficient causation helps clarify some of Aristotle's discussions of substantial change: when a new substance is produced, there are patients underlying that change, but the metaphysical efficient cause is responsible for producing the *new* substance because it provides the new substance with a *new* form. While Aristotle may not have endorsed this method of dealing with the difficulties surrounding discussions of new substances—he seems to have believed that the new material configuration simply resulted in the substance having a different (and, hence, new) form—Avicenna's solution draws upon Aristotelian principles and broadens the applicability of those principles. Saying that substantial forms are given by metaphysical efficient causes allows Avicenna to posit the notion that the *entire* substance may be given (or produced) by a metaphysical efficient cause. Another example may be the role that the Unmoved Mover plays in Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle uses the Unmoved Mover to explain the origins of motion. Avicenna uses God to explain the origins of both motion and existence.

b. Neoplatonic Emanation

Avicenna's treatment of Neoplatonic emanation similarly involves some interpretations, many of which are clearly rooted in previous Neoplatonic thought. It seems fair to ask whether the theory of causation Avicenna ultimately espouses—one in which an emanator produces new being by will rather than by nature or transcendent necessity—is properly termed 'Neoplatonic'.

Much of Avicenna's explication of the production of the universe via God's emanation closely follows traditional Neoplatonic emanation. An emanator produces a new being entirely of its own accord—no pre-existing matter is used to make this new being, and no agents outside of the causal chain initiated by the emanator are involved. The emanator

may produce being directly or indirectly—directly by immediately producing a being and indirectly by initiating a causal chain that results in the production of being(s). Avicenna follows the Plotinian tradition of Neoplatonic thought by asserting two things: first, that a simple being can produce only one simple being; and second, that there exist mediators between what exists in the universe and the first, simple being.⁵²⁹

Where Avicenna deviates from the Neoplatonic conception of emanation is his treatment of the divine will. The *Theology of Aristotle*, a work that seems to have influenced Fārābī's treatment of emanation, includes several propositions that deny a role for the will in the One.⁵³⁰ The “will does not precede the act of the First Agent because (the First Agent) acts by its being alone”.⁵³¹ In this tradition of Neoplatonic thought, the One does not *will* to emanate; it simply *is* something that emanates.⁵³² Avicenna deviates strongly and noticeably from this tradition, arguing instead that God *does* will to emanate. What complicates this explanation significantly is the fact that Avicenna *also* believes that God's will is (a) eternal and immutable and (b) a corollary of God's essence. Ultimately, God cannot fail to will to emanate given what God is; accordingly, God simply *is* the sort of being who wills to emanate.⁵³³ This statement is startlingly similar to Taylor's analysis of Neoplatonic emanation—that the First Agent simply *is* the sort of being that emanates. Avicenna deviates

⁵²⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.4.4.

⁵³⁰ See, for example, the *Letter on Divine Science* 105-9, which includes the notion that God acts through being alone or *Sayings of the Greek Sage*, I. 62-3 and I.84-6, which includes the notion that creation is volitionally necessary but that God's acts are *higher* than natural or volitional necessity (Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*, 146-148).

⁵³¹ Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 132; Taylor, “Primary Causality,” 127-128.

⁵³² Taylor, 128.

⁵³³ See, for example, Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* IX.1. p 300 6-11 and IX.4 p. 326 32-53; Acar, “Avicenna's Position on the Divine Creative Action,” 75.

from what is typically emphasized in the Plotinian strain of Neoplatonic thought to specifically insert the will into the causal explanation of God's emanation.⁵³⁴

2. Aquinas

a. Aristotelian Efficient Causation

Regarding how 'Aristotelian' Aquinas's account of metaphysical efficient causation is, as with Avicenna, it must be remembered that the medieval intuition that the truths of any one philosophical (or religious) theory must cohere with the truths of every other philosophical (or religious) theory looms large in the background of Aquinas's treatment of Aristotelian efficient causation. Aquinas's account of efficient causation echoes Aristotle's account in significant ways. The cause must be prior to its effect in some way. The cause, by acting, brings about the effect. When there is a patient upon which to act, the agent activates a potentiality in that patient. When there is no patient upon which to act, Aquinas thinks that such an agent would still be an efficient cause because the agent's action is what brings about the effect. While retaining many of the major components of Aristotelian efficient causation,

⁵³⁴ To say, however, that there are no Neoplatonic discussions of God willing to emanate perhaps oversimplifies the historical record, and it is at least possible that Avicenna drew upon some of these references when constructing his analysis of the role of God's will in emanating. For example, in the *Enneads*, what is denied is not strictly that the One has a will but that the One has a will *like a human will* (*Enneads* VI 8, 16, 32; Chase, 6. Chase references passages mentioned in Taylor, "Primary Causation," 129-130). A plausible interpretation of Plotinus's *Ennead* VI.8 is that, as Michael Chase notes, "the will of God or the One is identical to his substance, essence, and freedom" (Chase, 7, referencing Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8). If the One's existence is intimately related to the One's will, and the One's existence itself results in the One emanating, then, by the transitivity of identity, the One's will results in the One emanating (Chase makes a similar argument on p. 7). While Avicenna's description of God emanating due to God's will to emanate does deviate from the standard interpretation of emanation—and that found in Fārābī, for example—it does not necessarily deviate from *every* precursor in Neoplatonic thought (For an overview of al-Kindī's and al-Fārābī's emanatory schemes, see Inglis, 55-58). It emphasizes a strand of Neoplatonic thinking not popularized by Avicenna's forbearers. However, I do not argue specifically that Avicenna follows this interpretation of *Ennead* VI.8; instead, I merely intend to draw attention to the close parallels between these authors. Avicenna may have simply happened to strike upon a solution that is not entirely foreign to Plotinus's thought. It seems, though, that because there is a way in which Neoplatonic thought can grapple with issues of the divine will in emanating and affirm a role for the divine will that Avicenna's treatment of this issue fits within the larger Neoplatonic tradition.

Aquinas broadens the definition of efficient cause: an agent E is the efficient cause of P if E's action results in some thing P.

In Aquinas's famous five ways, it is easy to see the influence of Aristotelian thinking. Both the first and the second way to prove God's existence rely upon Aquinas's analysis of Aristotelian causation. In the first way, God's existence is proven by appeal to the fact that some things are in motion. Recall that Aquinas speaks of change—substantial or accidental change, the sorts of efficient causation that Avicenna described as natural efficient causation—in terms of motion. Motion simply is, for Aquinas, the activation of some potentiality. Because something cannot be both passive and active with respect to the same thing—water cannot be both cold and hot, for example—there must be some additional agent that activates that potentiality. Something must start the motion, and this something will not itself be in motion—otherwise, there would need to be an infinite chain of causes, something Aquinas dismisses. So, there must be some first mover, and “everyone understands” this mover to be God.⁵³⁵ In this defense of God's existence, Aquinas relies upon his understanding of Aristotelian efficient causation.

By appealing to God as an efficient cause, Aquinas, like Avicenna, addresses questions raised in response to the Aristotelian corpus. The references to an Unmoved Mover in the Aristotelian corpus are provided with argumentative support in Aquinas's⁵³⁶ first way. Aquinas stands in a long line of interpreters who attempt to use Aristotelian

⁵³⁵ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.2.3 resp. In the second way, Aquinas again appeals to efficient causation, but this time he appeals to God as an efficient cause. Nothing can be the efficient cause of itself, for to do so, it would have to exist prior to itself as an effect. Accordingly, there must be some other efficient cause of a thing's existence. Aquinas again rejects a chain of infinite causes, instead asserting that there must be some first efficient cause, who is God.

⁵³⁶ In this, Aquinas is indebted to both Avicenna and Maimonides. See Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* II.12 and Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.1 p. 195 3-4.

thinking to solve puzzles raised by Aristotelian thinking. To do so, he widens the boundaries of what counts as an efficient cause, but he uses Aristotelian tools to do so.

b. Neoplatonic Emanation

Regarding how ‘Neoplatonic’ Aquinas’s account of divine emanation is, one important element in Neoplatonic emanation is the notion that one simple being can produce only one simple being. Aquinas follows the Proclean Neoplatonic tradition, having read and commented upon the *Liber de Causis*, a Pseudo-Dionysian work that adopts and adapts numerous propositions from Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*. Pseudo-Dionysius seems, at times, to adopt this principle, but at other times he asserts that the One produces being directly, which suggests that the One can produce a multiplicity.⁵³⁷ Aquinas makes no such appeal to intermediaries, for he asserts that one simple being can directly produce multiple beings, and these multiple beings *together* reflect the perfection of God.⁵³⁸ Aquinas’s rejection of the notion that one simple being can directly produce only one simple being does not constitute a direct, abject rejection of Neoplatonic thought, but it does involve Aquinas following an under-emphasized aspect of one strain of Neoplatonic thought that seems to allow that God can directly produce a multitude of numerically and qualitatively distinct beings.

What does begin to distinguish Aquinas’s account of emanation from Neoplatonic emanation sharply are Aquinas’s treatment of intermediaries and the divine will. Aquinas utterly rejects intermediaries in the process of creating *ex nihilo* by emanating.⁵³⁹ Whereas Pseudo-Dionysius had retained intermediaries in his emanative scheme—even a scheme that

⁵³⁷ Dionysius [pseud.], *Liber de Causis*, trans. Taylor, in Taylor, “The *Liber de Causis*,” 4.1-4, 12, p. 289.

⁵³⁸ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.3.

⁵³⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 16, p. 107. See also his treatments of propositions 7 and 9.

allows God to produce multiple, qualitatively distinct beings directly—Aquinas rejects a role for intermediaries in creative emanation. Aquinas’s account of creative emanation is further distanced from Neoplatonic emanation by his insistence that when God emanates, producing the celestial and terrestrial realms, God does so by God’s will. Aquinas appeals to God’s will and clearly asserts that God has and exercises a will.

C. Neoplatonic Emanation and Efficient Causation as descriptors of God’s Act

Both Avicenna and Aquinas demonstrate that they believe these two ways of discussing God’s action are important and relevant ways to discuss the origination of the universe and what populates it. A relevant question is how, exactly, these ways of talking about God’s activity fit together. To examine this, I will consider first how they fit on Avicenna’s analysis and then how they fit on Aquinas’s analysis.

Avicenna makes it clear that it is possible—maybe even desirable—to use the language and concepts of efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation to describe the origination of the universe. It seems that Neoplatonic emanation is better able to capture the specific causal mechanics of the origination of the universe, and metaphysical efficient causation is able to capture the underlying conceptual support for the universe having been originated at all. Avicenna clearly finds the mechanics specified by Neoplatonic emanation to be helpful in avoiding running afoul both his other closely held (and well argued) philosophical beliefs *and* the Islamic understanding of creation: he can uphold the belief that God is the only necessary being as well as the belief that God voluntarily creates the universe; God is a simple being that is ultimately responsible for the myriad of qualitatively and quantitatively different things in the universe.

Aquinas leans the other direction, so to speak, emphasizing God's role as an efficient cause over God's role as a Neoplatonic emanator. What is important in Aquinas's discussions of creation is being able to show that there can be some act that produces the universe and what populates it. It is on this front that metaphysical efficient causation is useful to Aquinas in a manner similar to how Neoplatonic emanation was useful to Avicenna: it allows Aquinas to explain that God is capable of producing the universe *ex nihilo*. Aquinas adjusts his understanding of emanation to accord with his understanding of metaphysical efficient causation, and thus it seems that metaphysical efficient causation is the primary way in which Aquinas understands divine creation.

Ultimately, however, it seems likely that both Avicenna and Aquinas would endorse the proposition that Neoplatonic emanation is a species of metaphysical efficient causation. Metaphysical efficient causation can be understood as an agent producing something's being. This production of being could be *ex nihilo*, and Avicenna closely links the preservation of a thing's being with the production of that being, asserting that the agent who truly produces something's being also preserves that thing's being. For Avicenna, Neoplatonic emanation would be a *type* of efficient causation in which the production involves production by procession. God produces the First Intellect through procession, and through intermediaries, God produces the universe through procession as well. The Intellects are each produced through procession as well. The Giver of Forms is said to emanate the forms of newly produced substances—it provides the form to go along with the matter—and this is done without any underlying patient; the form is produced by the Giver of Forms and joined to the matter, where it inheres.⁵⁴⁰ Since each of these described instances of

⁵⁴⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing* VI.4 p. 202. For an extended discussion, see Kara Richardson, "The Metaphysics of Agency: Avicenna and his Legacy," 68-79.

emanation are instances of the production of being and the preservation of being—two indicators of Avicenna’s metaphysical efficient causation—it seems that these instances of emanation simply are instances of metaphysical efficient causation. Each Neoplatonic emanator, then, is also a metaphysical efficient cause.

Aquinas approaches Neoplatonic emanation differently than Avicenna, but the relationship he seems to envision between emanation and metaphysical efficient causation is similar to the relationship envisioned by Avicenna. Aquinas reinterprets creative emanation to be the voluntary and direct procession of being from God, and this is a production that does not require any patient or pre-existing material. When introducing creation in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asserts that creation is the emanation of all being by God.⁵⁴¹ Creation, though, is the preeminent example given of an agent causing something *ex nihilo*, so it should perhaps be unsurprising that this creative emanation has the same causal factors as metaphysical efficient causation. An agent, who precedes the effect in some way, produces something *ex nihilo*. Aquinas discusses God as a *causa agente* in his commentary on the *Liber de Causis* in which emanation is the primary method for discussing the production of the universe.⁵⁴² Metaphysical efficient causation and creative emanation can be performed only by a fully actualized agent, which means that God is the only agent who can cause in that manner. Aquinas seems not to understand there to be a significant difference between metaphysical efficient causation and creative emanation—in fact, he seems to think that these two terms describe the same type of causation. Creative emanation simply is a type of metaphysical efficient causation in which the agent preexists the effect in some way, the agent produces something *ex nihilo*, and this production can be described as a procession. It

⁵⁴¹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.45.1. resp.

⁵⁴² Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 26 commentary, p. 144.

is important to distinguish, however, that natural emanation—what occurs in the procession of the members of the Trinity—is distinct from metaphysical efficient causation insofar as the procession of the members of the Trinity is a natural, eternal process that is not, strictly speaking, productive of *new* being.

IV. Aristotelian Efficient Causation and Neoplatonic Emanation as Creation

What must yet be addressed is how, precisely, the causal explanations to which Avicenna and Aquinas appeal in their discussions of God creating do or do not align with their monotheistic conception of creation. Avicenna and Aquinas both attempt to solve the problem of creation by denying any incompatibility between the philosophical theories of causation and the monotheistic account of creation. The differences and relative successes in their methods of resolving the supposed incompatibilities are explored below. The section closes with a discussion of whether Aristotelian efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation can truly be understood as causal explanations for the unique monotheistic conception of creating, and in so doing, I respond to some recent challenges raised by scholars.

A. Solving the Problem of Creation

While both Avicenna and Aquinas address the supposed incompatibilities between each philosophical theory and the monotheistic account of creation, I contend that Avicenna focuses on the issue of voluntary creation: he presents a Neoplatonic conception of emanation in which it is possible for God to emanate voluntarily. I also contend that Aquinas focuses on addressing issues of creating *ex nihilo*: he presents an Aristotelian account of creation in which God, by acting, is able to produce new being *ex nihilo*.

1. Avicenna

I argue that Avicenna's approach to solving the problem of creation involves him focusing primarily upon the issue of voluntary creating. While the main methods used by Avicenna when discussing the origins of the universe are rooted in Neoplatonic emanation, Avicenna also argues that issues raised by Aristotelian efficient causation suggest that it is possible for there to be an efficient cause that acts without a patient. So, Avicenna ultimately solves the issues raised by the problem of creation: he argues that Neoplatonic emanation can be voluntary, and he argues that Aristotelian efficient causation can be *ex nihilo*.

A potential objection to my assertion that Avicenna solves the problem of creation by finding a place for God's will in emanating is that Avicenna also addresses the issue of Aristotelian efficient causation *ex nihilo*. If Avicenna solves the supposed incompatibilities with Aristotelian efficient causation and Neoplatonic emanation, then it seems incorrect to argue that Avicenna primarily solves the problem of creation by addressing the issue of voluntary creating. This objection relies upon the data I have already presented.

In response to this sort of objection, I appeal to Avicenna's general approach to discussions of creation. When Avicenna discusses the origins of the universe in *Metaphysics of the Healing*, he has an extended discussion not of Aristotle's efficient causation but of Neoplatonic emanation. The primary way in which Avicenna discusses how God creates is in terms of emanating. Thus, when I assert that Avicenna solves the problem of creation by solving the problem of voluntary emanation, I mean that the *sharpest* problem for Avicenna was addressing how his primary means of understanding creating—emanating—could be compatible with his theological conception of creating.

Also, Avicenna relies upon several non-Aristotelian philosophical influences to garner support for his notion that Aristotelian efficient causation must include causation *ex nihilo*. He depends upon philosophical principles that may be latent in Aristotelian thinking but that are clearly expressed in Neoplatonic thought—namely, that there is one necessary being and that this one necessary being *must* be indirectly responsible for causing all that exists. Avicenna’s main discussions of creating are done in terms of Neoplatonic emanation, and components of Neoplatonic thought present in his discussion of Neoplatonic emanation affect his understanding of Aristotelian efficient causation as well. Not only does Avicenna speak of the mechanics of creating in terms of Neoplatonic emanation, but Avicenna also interprets Aristotelian efficient causation in light of Neoplatonic concepts. Thus, I argue that while Avicenna does address the purported incompatibilities between monotheistic creating and each causal theory, he *primarily* addresses creation in terms of Neoplatonic emanation and sets out *primarily* to solve the problem of voluntary creation.

2. Aquinas

Aquinas consistently uses the language of efficient causation to describe God creating the universe, both in his casual references to divine creation and his more detailed analyses of how God created. When discussing creation, Aquinas does not use the language of efficient causation exclusively, for he also consistently uses the term ‘emanation’ as a near synonym of the term ‘creation’. In his commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, Aquinas never denies that the emanatory scheme described cannot apply to God’s creation, but he similarly never endorses the notions that God must create, that God must create by intermediaries, or that God does create by intermediaries. So, Aquinas, too, addresses the purported

incompatibilities of each philosophical theory and divine creating, arguing that God is an efficient cause that creates *ex nihilo* and that God as an emanator emanates voluntarily.

A similar objection to what was raised against Avicenna could be raised here, namely that Aquinas addresses the supposed incompatibility of each philosophical theory and divine creating rather than simply addressing God as an efficient cause who acts *ex nihilo*. Since Aquinas addresses both theories, it is possible at least that it is wrong to discuss his approach as one that is aimed more toward solving one of these incompatibilities. Were Aquinas to entirely dismiss talk of creation by emanation, the thesis that Aquinas solves the problem of creation by focusing on creation *ex nihilo* would clearly be correct. Given the fact that Aquinas does address creation as emanation as well, the thesis proposed seems not to have been proven.

I argue that Aquinas *primarily* addresses the issue of how God can create *ex nihilo* rather than how God can create voluntarily for several reasons. First, Aquinas does address whether God acts voluntarily, but interestingly, he never addresses this question specifically within the context of emanation (unlike Avicenna, who addresses the voluntariness of God's actions both within and without the context of emanation). One must presume that God would emanate by will, for anything God does, God does by will.⁵⁴³

Furthermore, when Aquinas goes into detail addressing issues surrounding creation, a question he addresses explicitly and with great detail is whether the universe is produced *ex nihilo*. According to Aquinas, it is both the case that Christian theology teaches this and the case that philosophical reasoning teaches this: God producing the universe *ex nihilo* is a

⁵⁴³ More importantly, Aquinas's discussion of God emanating because God is good occur within the context of *final* causation rather than efficient causation, suggesting that Aquinas's primary usage of the language of emanation is tied to his understanding of the goal of all created things to return to God and be as much like God as possible. See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.37.

possible explanation for the origins of the universe in Aquinas's estimation, and since Aquinas denies that an actual infinite chain is possible, it seems that the production of the world *ex nihilo* is likely the best explanation in Aquinas's estimation (though God creating *ex nihilo* is a matter of faith for Aquinas). His focus in discussions of creation is not to demonstrate that God creates by will but instead to demonstrate that God creates *ex nihilo*.

Additionally, Aquinas's understanding of emanation seems to have been influenced by his understanding of Aristotelian efficient causation. In his commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, for example, Aquinas appeals to God as a *causa agente*—an efficient cause—when discussing God's emanation.⁵⁴⁴ Whereas the distinction between necessary and non-necessary beings is essential to Avicenna's understanding of creation, Aquinas instead employs the distinction between fully actualized beings and non-fully actualized beings.⁵⁴⁵ Even when discussing creating in terms of emanating, Aquinas makes use of Aristotelian concepts to elucidate emanating. The philosophical theory that Aquinas uses to understand other philosophical theories is Aristotle's philosophy, which strongly suggests that Aquinas approaches solving philosophical problems primarily through the lens of Aristotelian philosophy. Thus, it is the case that Aquinas addresses both philosophical theories in the context of creating, but he spends much of his time addressing and solving the issue of creation *ex nihilo* in terms of Aristotelian efficient causation.

B. Application to discussions of Creation

A remaining objection to address is whether either Aristotelian efficient causation without patients or Neoplatonic voluntary emanation apply to the monotheistic conception of creation. In his article on the religious doctrine of creation and conservation in the *Concise*

⁵⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Liber de Causis*, proposition 11 commentary, p. 85.

⁵⁴⁵ Aquinas, *ST Ia*. Questions 3-11; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I questions 14-28 and 37-48.

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, W. Hasker contrasts creation, which involves an act of will on God's part, and emanation, which does not involve an act of God's will.⁵⁴⁶ David Burrell draws attention to this common way of discussing creating in his *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, noting that creation is *free* while emanation is *necessary*.⁵⁴⁷ So, it seems that it is fair, at least, to seek to confirm that the accounts of God's causing the existence of the universe do indeed align with the monotheistic account of creation described in chapter one. In so doing, another benefit of this study will be revealed: the explication of Avicenna's and Aquinas's theories of divine causation in producing the universe helps answer questions regarding the nature of creating. This study helps to resolve a dispute between Richard Taylor and Michael Chase regarding whether emanation has historically been understood as creating.

1. Creation and Emanation

Hasker's (relatively common) approach to understanding creation and emanation relies on three premises: first, that emanation does not involve an act of will; second, that monotheistic accounts of creation do involve an act of will; and third, that necessity and volition are incompatible. In response to Hasker's definition of creation as involving God's will, Taylor surveys the *Liber de Causis* and some of Aquinas's comments on creation to suggest that Hasker's approach is misguided. Taylor's response to Hasker's definition and Chase's response to Taylor help clarify some central issues in the debate about whether

⁵⁴⁶ William Hasker, "Creation and Conservation, Religious Doctrine of", in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 180..

⁵⁴⁷ David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1993), 8-9. Elsewhere, Burrell challenges the notion that this standard way of approaching the issue of creation is the proper way to approach the issue. See his "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," in *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 27.

Avicenna's and Aquinas's accounts of God's causing the existence of the universe are accounts of God creating.

Hasker's definition presumes—or requires—that the answer is no. However, as a historical matter, Hasker's definition is too presumptive. Taylor argues that the production of the universe described in *Liber de Causis* is indeed a creation account (and that Aquinas treats it as such).⁵⁴⁸ The claim that the emanatory scheme described in *Liber de Causis* is creation is questioned by Michael Chase, who raises several objections to interpreting emanation as creation, three of which are important in light of the question regarding whether Avicenna's and Aquinas's accounts of God's causation in producing the universe are accounts of God creating. First, Chase mentions the problem of free creation in light of Taylor's insistence that emanation is the transcendently necessary production of being. If emanation is necessary, then God does not have the ability to do otherwise, and, Chase suggests, God does not create freely.⁵⁴⁹ Second, Chase notes that Christians have long endorsed the belief that God exists *before* the universe in terms of ontological priority and in

⁵⁴⁸ In the context of Hasker's definitions, Taylor primarily argues that the *Liber de Causis* discusses the origination of the universe in terms of creation but does not include any statements whatsoever about the emanation by which the universe is produced occurring by God's will. Additionally, he notes that Aquinas gives two conditions for creating, and neither of these conditions is that God will to create. Instead, creation must occur *ex nihilo*, and the creator must be ontologically prior to that which is created (Aquinas, *In 2 Sent.* d.1 q.1. a.2 resp; Taylor, "Primary Causation," 132). Taylor further challenges the premise that necessity and volition are incompatible by clarifying what sort of necessity applies to traditional Neoplatonic conceptions of emanation. Necessity in emanating is a transcendent necessity—by virtue of existing, the One emanates. Taylor distinguishes this from the internal necessity (which does not apply to the One because the One is above existence and does not have a form) and external necessity (which does not apply to the One because the One is not bound by anything outside itself). Taylor concludes that emanation as described in the *Liber de Causis* certainly is considered to be creation by Aquinas regardless of the facts that emanating does not involve God's will in the *Liber de Causis* and that God's emanation is subject to transcendent necessity in the *Liber de Causis* (Taylor, "Primary Causation," 135). Neither the lack of discussion of the role of God's will nor the implicit denial that God creates without any necessity—which is how Hasker seems to be understanding free creation—deter Taylor from concluding that emanation would have been classed as creation by Aquinas and, historically, many other monotheists.

⁵⁴⁹ Michael Chase, "Abrahamic Creation and Neoplatonic Emanation in Greek, Arabic, and Latin: Reflections on a recent paper by Richard Taylor," 3.

terms of temporal priority.⁵⁵⁰ While Chase focuses on Christian beliefs in this criticism, this claim can be applied to Muslims as well.⁵⁵¹ Third, Chase notes that it is difficult to address whether God acts by will or whether God must create because of the penchant Neoplatonists have for asserting that God is above existence or above perfection. Strictly speaking, Chase argues, it is incorrect for Taylor to assert that the One *needs* to do anything because it does not have needs. Additionally, Neoplatonists clearly assert that if the One has a will, it is not like a human will; this statement, however, does not mean that Neoplatonists deny that the One has a will at all.⁵⁵² Chase supposes that these three issues must be addressed before conceding that the emanation described in the *Liber de Causis* is creation.

2. Creation and Emanation in Avicenna and Aquinas

Chase's response to Taylor raises several important issues for considering whether Avicenna and Aquinas present accounts of emanation that fit with the monotheistic conception of creation. Chase mentions free creation, aspects of temporal priority, and aspects of the *supra* conception of the One, particularly issues of the One's will. These issues, in turn, are problematic, as addressed below. These issues appear in Avicenna's and Aquinas's accounts, and it is helpful to briefly review how each deals with these issues.

a. Avicenna

Avicenna does contend that God's emanation that results in the existence of the universe is a voluntary emanation but that God could not do otherwise; this, in itself, is not enough information to assert that Avicenna denies God's free creation. The reason, however, why God could not do otherwise is because God could not *will* otherwise.

⁵⁵⁰ Chase, 4.

⁵⁵¹ Take, for example, the arguments between Ghazali and Averroës regarding Avicenna's account of creation. Ghazali represents a strong contingent of Muslim theologians who endorsed the view that Allah was ontologically and temporally prior to the universe.

⁵⁵² Chase, 6-7.

Avicenna emphasizes the willed aspect of creating being a free act of God's. To assert that Avicenna denies that God creates freely is to adopt a particular understanding of freedom—namely, that freedom requires the choice between alternatives. This understanding of free action is not the only understanding available, and a common alternative understanding of free action is that any action is free should the agent consent to this action. Under this compatibilist understanding of freedom, Avicenna's account is clearly an account of God's free creation.

When discussing the age of the universe, Avicenna contends that the universe is sempiternal, which means that it has existed as long as God has existed but that it is ontologically dependent upon God. Chase's discussion of temporal priority assumes that sempiternity *must* not be considered compatible with God creating; this issue is a point of discussion and disagreement among Muslim (and Christian) theologians, but Chase assumes intellectual uniformity on this point. Furthermore, his approach to temporal priority assumes a particular relationship between God, time, and the universe. For God to have temporal priority, God must exist *in time* with the universe. This view of God's relation to time is contested—even within the medieval period—and thus it seems best *not* to include temporal priority as a component of creating.⁵⁵³

In Avicenna's account of emanation, he does speak at times of God as though God were beyond perfection or beyond being. Avicenna's account of God's will fits well with what Chase suggests about *any* Neoplatonic account of God's will, for Avicenna explains that God's will is not like human will. Thus, he contrasts God's willing with human willing.

⁵⁵³ See, for example, Richard Sorabji's *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* in which Sorabji surveys historical approaches to the relationship between God and time. He also addresses issues regarding God's relationship to creation with regard to time. In *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* by William Lane Craig, Craig provides an overview of the different approaches to God's relation to time.

Avicenna's discussion of God's will is not severely hampered by the Neoplatonic tendency to emphasize the otherness of the One.

b. Aquinas

Aquinas, like Avicenna, seems at times to imply that God could not do otherwise than create. Aquinas says that God could have created *other* things or that God could have gone about the order of creating in a different manner. God does not will things other than God necessarily but instead brings about the existence of other beings as a result of divine volition.⁵⁵⁴ When considering whether God's volition to create is free, Aquinas discusses such freedom in terms of a lack of internal or external constraints, and he finds that God has no such constraints. Aquinas, then, uses a different standard for freedom than the ability to choose from among options.⁵⁵⁵ While Aquinas's account may not include a robust view of freedom—that of an agent choosing between viable alternatives, namely to create or not to create—Aquinas would have considered his account to be one of a generous God who freely and volitionally creates.

Regarding temporal priority, Aquinas does not endorse the Avicennian sempiternity of the universe. Avicenna and Aquinas differ in this regard, for Avicenna believes that the immutability of God's will entails that God must emanate the universe as long as God exists. Aquinas believes that God can will to delay God's action, meaning that it is possible that God could be the only being in existence at some point. As Taylor notes, Aquinas mentions *but does not endorse* the view that creation entails temporal priority on God's part in his commentary on the *Sentences*. Aquinas asserts that it is an article of faith that God existed

⁵⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81.

⁵⁵⁵ See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.28 & 29; *On the Power of God* 3.16.

alone, so he does not add it to his definition of creation in the *Sentences*.⁵⁵⁶ Furthermore, it is the case that issues of temporal priority in creation depend upon a certain understanding of God's relation to time—and precisely how God relates to time has been a long-standing debate among theists.⁵⁵⁷

Finally, Aquinas at times discusses God as being above being or above perfection as well, but like Avicenna, he is still able to hold robust discussions of God's nature and being in light of these claims. Regarding God's will, as mentioned above, Aquinas does not specifically discuss God's will when Aquinas discusses emanating. Though this seems to be largely because Aquinas has already settled the issue, arguing that God's will is involved in whatever God does, it is perhaps somewhat telling that Aquinas does not feel the need to defend a role for God's will in emanating given the lack of discussion of God's will in the *Liber de Causis*. Aquinas does not specify that God's will is involved in emanating, but he argues passionately against (what he takes to be) Avicenna's position that God's will is *not* involved in emanating in his *On the Power of God*.⁵⁵⁸ Aquinas, like Avicenna, asserts that God's will is not like human will, but he manages to discuss God's will nonetheless.⁵⁵⁹

c. Emanation can properly be termed a type of Creating

The assumptions Chase articulates regarding creating, which seem to preclude that emanating could be creating, are flawed. Close examination suggests that two of Chase's critiques of understanding emanating as creating rely upon other philosophical assumptions that must be justified, for there are multiple understandings of freedom and of God's relation to time. Avicenna and Aquinas are able to explain how God's will is involved in the

⁵⁵⁶ Aquinas, *In 2 Sent.* d.1 q.1. a.2 resp; Taylor, "Primary Causation," 132.

⁵⁵⁷ Again, see for example Richard Sorabji's *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.

⁵⁵⁸ Aquinas, *On the Power of God* 3.15.

⁵⁵⁹ Aquinas, *ST* Ia.19.

creative act and how God's decision to create involves God's agency (rather than simply being a side effect of God's brute existence). The umbrella of creating, described in chapter one, is certainly broad enough to include both Avicenna's and Aquinas's account of God's emanating.

C. Creating is Efficiently Causing

The thesis that God producing the universe via efficient causation is not challenged in the disagreement between Taylor and Chase, but it is still important to clarify whether metaphysical efficient causation meets the requirements of creating. Because an efficient cause can be voluntary or natural (and Avicenna and Aquinas explain that God acts voluntarily), metaphysical efficient causation clearly meets this requirement. As noted above, God is ontologically prior to the universe, and thus metaphysical efficient causation meets this requirement of creating as well. Whether metaphysical efficient causation is creating, then, seems to depend upon whether it can occur *ex nihilo*. While both Avicenna and Aquinas discuss some metaphysical efficient causes that *conserve* rather than create (or in addition to creating, in some instances), it is true that not every instance of metaphysical efficient causation would be creating. However, because metaphysical efficient causation can occur *ex nihilo*, it is possible that it can be creating.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the importance of Avicenna's and Aquinas's answers to the problem of creation for the metaphysics of causation. Understanding how Avicenna and Aquinas answer the problem of creation entails understanding what causes each believe exist. Avicenna and Aquinas both speak in terms of metaphysical efficient causation and emanation, and it is significant that both believe these types of causation to be

closely related. It is also important to note that despite these similarities between these types of causation, neither entirely subsumes the language of one type of causation under the language of another type. Avicenna and Aquinas each seem to believe that something important is preserved by holding onto language and concepts associated with each sort of cause. Similarly, this study reveals that it is grossly inaccurate to attempt to characterize either Avicenna or Aquinas as purely Aristotelian or purely Neoplatonic thinkers. Certain aspects of their philosophical thought—including their explications of causation—may be more or less Aristotelian or Neoplatonic, but even in such aspects, the two philosophical influences are often present together.

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